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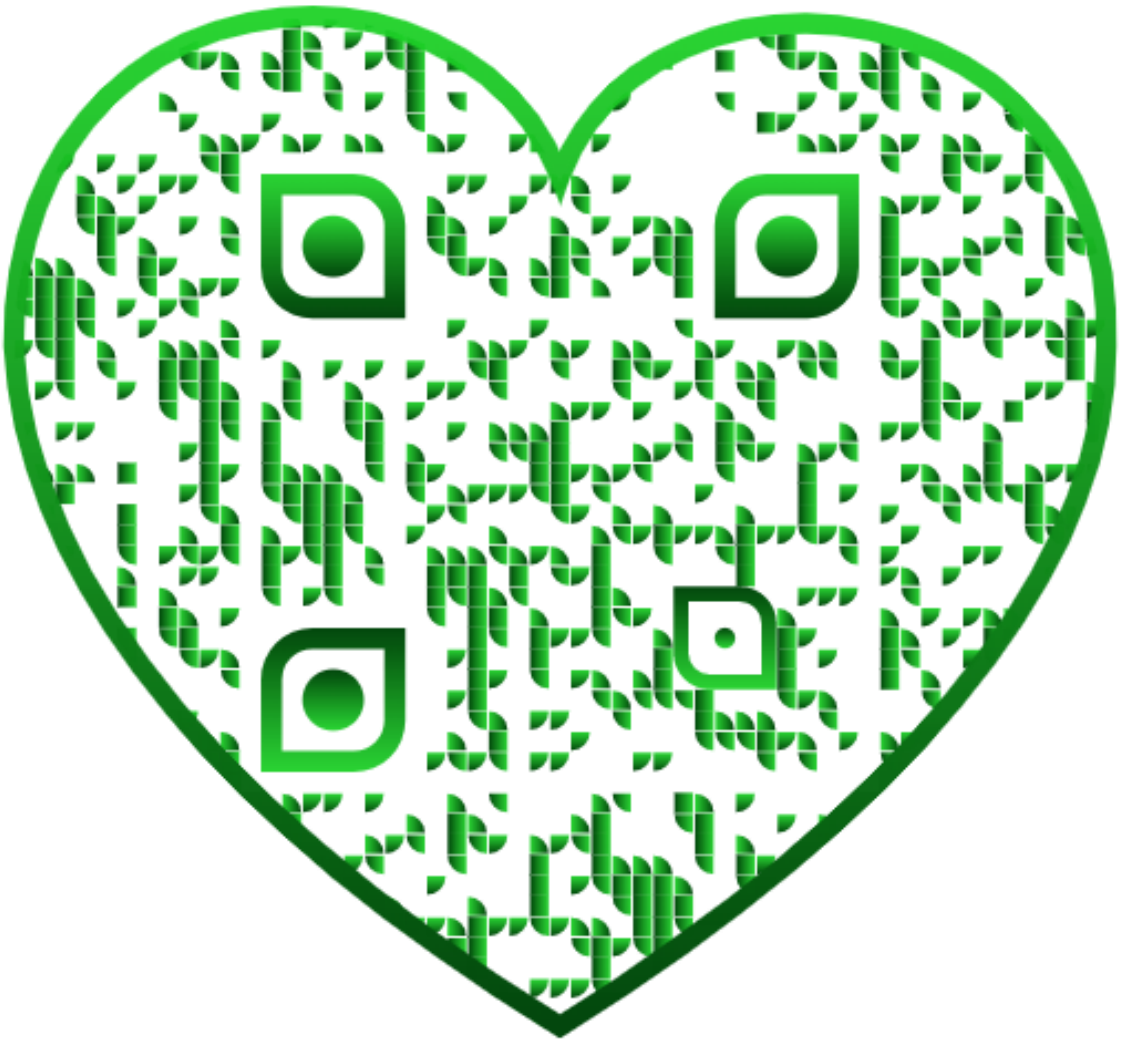

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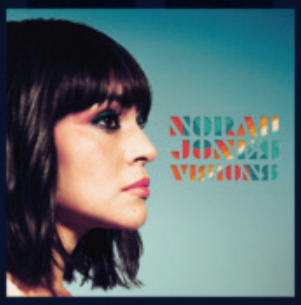

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APRIL 2024

inside

ON THE COVER

22 Béla Fleck's *Rhapsody*

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

Over the course of his eclectic career — one that stretches across four decades — Grammy-winning banjo virtuoso Béla Fleck has boldly, almost defiantly, taken his five-stringed instrument to places where no banjo player has gone before. As proof, witness his latest project, *Rhapsody In Blue*, reinterpreting the century-old Gershwin classic with a brand new twist.

Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong — two undeniable members of the 90 most influential artists in jazz history — on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1961.

Cover photo by Hazel Coonagh

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MICHAEL JACKSON

Christian McBride, one of today's guiding lights on the jazz scene, is one of only two artists under 60 to make this list.

The Dumbest Idea Ever?

WE KNOW THAT MAGAZINES, FANS AND anybody who has listened to a lot of music have attempted to make lists of their favorite songs, artists and albums. It's just some odd quirk of human nature. So, when the question of how to kick off our 90th anniversary year in 2024 was raised last summer, we said, "Why not do the 90 greatest artists in jazz history?"

OK, "we" didn't say it. I did.

But the rest of the DB crew went along with the idea. Seemed like a no-brainer. After all, it's become commonplace in the music media to generate lists like this: "The 500 greatest albums of all time," "The 100 greatest guitarists of all time," etc. Here at DownBeat, we've also done it, our 75th anniversary year being a prime example.

But this task turned out to make our collective brain hurt. How the hell do you boil jazz's vast history of people, creativity, art, music, toil and sweat from thousands upon thousands of artists down to a mere 90 individuals?

Let's just say what I thought would be a fun experiment was painful.

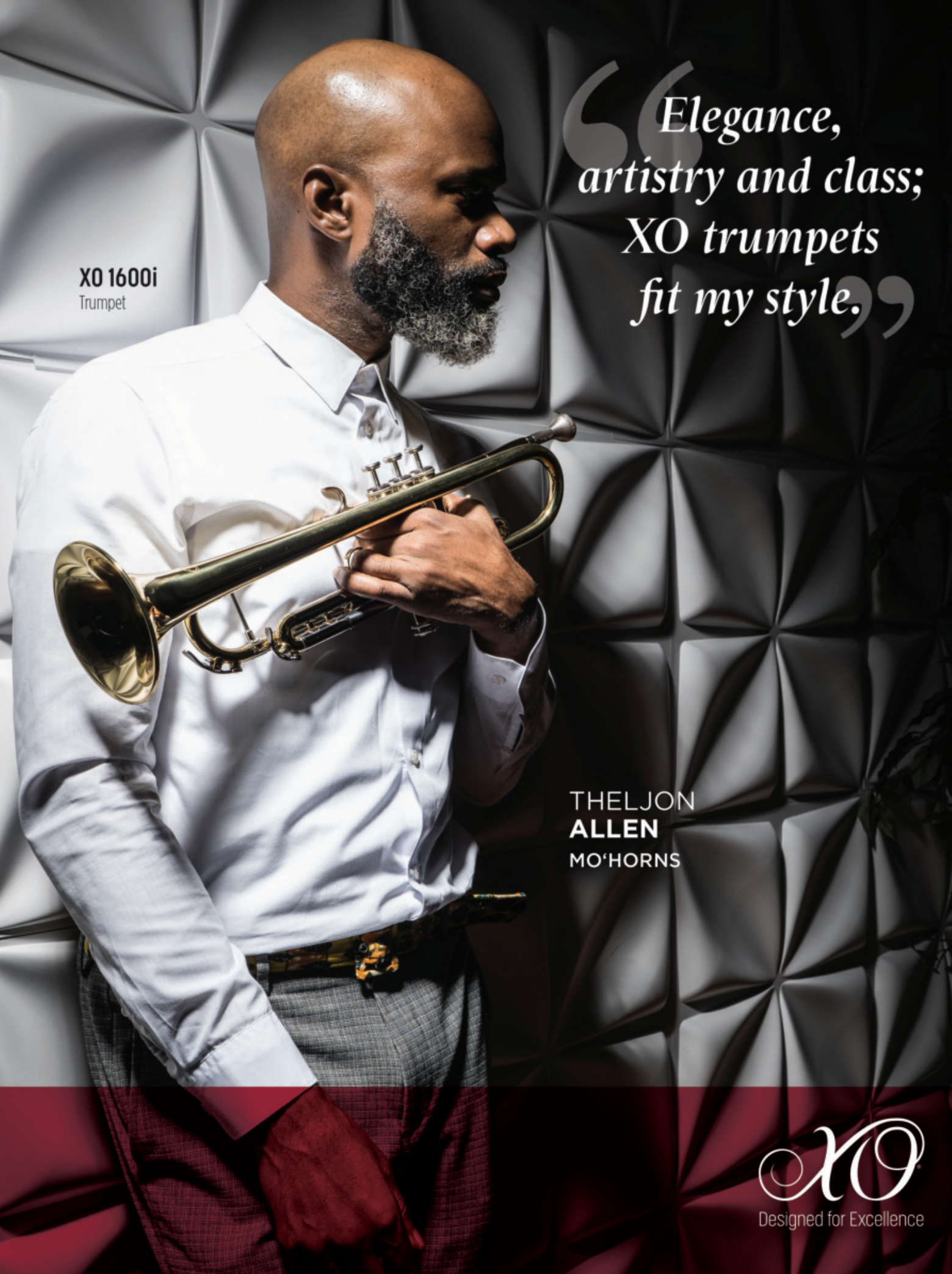
We started out with a list of more than 200 names and sent it out to the editorial staff, who began to ask, "What about … ?" The list grew. Then we set about the work of trying to pare that list down. I took the first shot, creating a spreadsheet so we could all see who was being eliminated in what round. After hours of debate (with myself), the list was down to about 200. I sent it out to Mike West, our reviews editor, and Ed Enright, our senior editor. They whittled a few more names down. Then it went from tough (choosing between favorites) to nearly impossible: choosing between literal gods of this music.

Phrases like, "I'll go to my grave …" were bandied about to suggest an artist should be on, or off. With each round, we would independently make a list of who we had to cut. If all three agreed, we'd grudgingly remove that artist — *very* grudgingly. If not, they went through to the next round.

Beginning on page 39, you can see that final list. It took seven rounds, which felt more like a 15-round championship boxing match. Well, actually, it was eight. After that seventh round, Mike West noted that the youngest artist on the list was 62, and hasn't there been anyone worthy of "greatest" consideration to come around after that? So, that eighth round required more hand-wringing over who could fill those spots, as well as additional, exceedingly painful, cuts to the list. In the end, we happily added Christian McBride and Jason Moran, two of the guiding lights on today's jazz scene.

After that, we said, "Why not pick one great tune from that artist to give as an example?" If you have beefs with those tunes, blame me. Some are as obvious as Benny Goodman's "Sing, Sing, Sing." Others are just songs that have been meaningful to me.

That's how this month's jazz sausage was made! Could this list have been different? Heck, yes. But this is the list, on this day, at this hour, at this minute. Check it out. Smile at what we got right. Scoff at where we went wrong. Let me know how we did and who we missed. I'm all ears at editor@downbeat.com. Stay tuned for more fun, though: Our official 90th anniversary edition comes your way with the July issue! **DB**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Chords & Discords

No Myth in Philly

Thank you very much for preparing and publishing another edition of your "100+ Great Jazz Venues" series, in the February 2024 edition of your magazine. We appreciate this very useful series — especially for planning travel.

For the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, portion, you very rightly included Chris Jazz Café and South Restaurant & Jazz Club. However, you have a huge omission for our City of Brotherly Love — the somewhat new (just over one-year-old) jazz venue Solar Myth (solarmythbar.com). This club is the home base for the absolutely essential Ars Nova Workshop (arsnovaworkshop.org), which is a U.S. national and international treasure for promoting both up-and-coming and well-established jazz acts — including our international treasure and beloved Sun Ra Arkestra and its still quite active leader Marshall Allen (who will turn 100 years young this May).

The Solar Myth club is a combination jazz/experimental live performance club, wine/beer/amaro bar, coffee shop, lounge and vinyl records shop. When the live music is not onstage, the wine/coffee bar and lounge has recorded jazz playing in a background for an absolutely wonderful hangout for jazz fans.

I hope you and your staff will stop by Solar Myth on your next visit to our wonderful city!

TIM HERRING
PHILADELPHIA

Head to Dear Head Inn

How can DownBeat keep omitting the venerable Deer Head Inn, the country's longest running jazz club, in your list of top jazz scenes? Longtime pied à terre for the late Phil Woods and very-much-alive Dave Liebman, it's situated just off the Appalachian Trail in beautiful Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania. Make a visit to the Deer Head, and you'll never forget the experience or the great vibe there.

ROB STEVENS
ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Editor's Note: Thanks Rob. We didn't feel comfortable adding the inn to the list this year because it had to close temporarily due to a stretch of road being washed out. The Deer Head Inn will be back on next year's list!

'Juhmping' for Johnathan

Thank you Ammar Kalia for the excellent article on Johnathan Blake in the January 2024 issue. I have enjoyed listening to this superb young drummer on many of my favorite jazz records and live shows the past 10 years.

I also enjoyed the article on Samara Joy (my favorite vocalist) by Suzanne Lorge. I caught her live twice in 2022 and once this year. My favorite show of the three was the one where she was backed by the Pasquale Grasso Trio. It was a very intimate and excellent show.

Finally, it was great to see four of my favorite records from this year in your Best Albums of 2023 list, especially Terell Stafford's *Between Two Worlds*. I shouldn't be surprised as I read the record reviews or articles about them in your magazine. I was disappointed that Pat Metheny's *Dream Box* record didn't make the list. It was my favorite record of 2023 and an excellent addition to his solo discography.

MARC NEBOZENKO
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Making Radio History Disappear

I am disappointed and, currently, greatly inconvenienced by DownBeat's decision to force World Radio History to remove the DownBeat archive.

I've been engaged in writing a biography of a jazz musician for a number of years and the World Radio History DownBeat archive has proved invaluable.

W WHITE
LEEDS, U.K.

Editor's Note: Dear Mr. White. I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but folks shouldn't, and can't, just slap up complete issues of DownBeat online for their own financial gain without first making an agreement with us. Meanwhile, we are working toward putting our own archive online for readers, researchers and fans like you.

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COURTESY ECM RECORDS

Two ECM reissues of historic albums by saxophonist Jan Garbarek, shown here with pianist Keith Jarrett, celebrate his 50 years on the label.

Retracing Jan Garbarek's ECM Emergence

It has become standard practice for jazz labels of any substance and historical depth to revisit, remaster and re-issue gems from their vaults. The natural process becomes ever more significant when the label is one of widely acknowledged and unique artistic importance as well as having attained the elite glow of milestone longevity. Both conditions aptly describe ECM Records. The label that founding producer Manfred Eicher built — and continues building — officially turned 50 in 2019, and its reissuing program of titles from a half century and more ago takes on new cultural meaning with age, and ageless, relevance.

ECM's latest archival forum comes in the form of two important albums, both from the early 1970s featuring iconic Norwegian alto saxophonist Jan Garbarek, being issued on vinyl with the original embossed sleeves and fitted with new liner notes. Between the acclaimed and surprisingly sometimes rough-edged Garbarek quartet (guitarist Terje Rypdal, bassist Arild Andersen and drummer Jon Christensen) album debut *Afric Pepperbird* from 1971 and Keith Jarrett's Garbarek-featured chamber jazz venture *Luminessence*, from 1974, the pair of albums nicely demonstrate the range of even the young Garbarek's musicality. He roamed freely and easily from fervent John Coltrane-esque intensity to clarion lyrical flights suitable for classical-tinged contexts.

By the time of the release of *Luminessence*, Jarrett's alliances with both classical composition and orchestration and a kinship with Garbarek were well-established. Garbarek was

a key player in Jarrett's "European Quartet" in the 1970s, along with bassist Palle Danielsson and Christensen (contrasting Jarret's "American" quartet with tenor saxophonist Dewey Redman, bassist Charlie Haden and drummer Paul Motian). Jarrett had also previously blended jazz and classical machinations on the album *In The Light* and would continue in 1976 with the renowned *Abour Zena*, also showcasing the soloing voice of Garbarek, as well as Haden.

(A broad overview of Jarrett's vast discography reflects his passionate engagement with classical music, both of his own devising and as interpreter of existing repertoire. The newest entry in Jarrett's discography, for instance, is a luminous recording of keyboard music by C.P.E. Bach, translated from harpsichord to piano and originally recorded in Jarrett's home "Cavelight" studio in 1994, finally issued in 2023.)

'The melodies that Jarrett writes sound like Garbarek improvisations, so great is the rapport between the two men.'

Despite Jarrett's earlier orchestrated projects in the '70s, *Luminessence* — released the same year as the well-known "European Quartet's" debut *Belonging* — showed a deeper engagement with Jarrett's chamber orchestral palette (with the strings from the Südfunk Symphony Orchestra Stuttgart Orchestra). Here, Garbarek was featured as the album's more prominent and improvisational protagonist atop the string textures. Jarrett's three pieces on the album form loosely form a suite, evolving from the pensive and lightly dissonant opening "Numinor" through the drone-like brood of "Windsong" and capped off with the joyful pulse and themes of the title piece. Throughout, Garbarek's signature saxophonic voice soars with a kind of tender heroism.

In his five-star DownBeat review of the album, Ian Carr asserted, "The melodies that Jarrett writes sound like Garbarek improvisations, so great is the rapport between the two men."

Heard a half century later, *Luminessence* suggests that it could be an influential seedbed of the impulse for classical-jazz hybridization currently being explored by many musicians seeking to unhinge stubborn genre constraints. By contrast, Garbarek conveys a wilder side of his musical persona on *Afric Pepperbird*, recorded in the tender early years of ECM's existence and before any Jarrett link was made manifest. The music contained — and sometimes barely contained — on this quartet debut blends touches of the coloristic and impressionistic qualities to come in his career, but also unleashes an edgy, cathartic intensity evocative of later-period Coltrane's abandon and the exploratory license of free-jazz and electric Miles Davis voodoo (as on "Blow Away Zone" and the title track).

In a 1971 DownBeat review, Joe Klee lavishly lauded Garbarek's arrival on the jazz scene, especially in its special case European orbit, noting that his "playing is full of jagged edges and beautiful surprises, Coltrane-influenced but his own. Garbarek should be heard. I would venture that not since Django Reinhardt has there been a European jazz musician so original and forward-looking as this young Norwegian."

While Garbarek was unavailable for an interview for this article, we checked in with veteran Norwegian bassist Andersen, whose own long and fruitful association with ECM Records as sideman and as leader had its launch on *Afric Pepperbird*. He would go on to work and record expansively with fellow Norwegians Garbarek, Rypdal and Christensen, but this formative quartet had a particular importance, and expressive firepower. Andersen confirms that the 1970 album "started our early-'70 ties. Manfred and I became good friends and he invited me to several recordings at that time. It has been natural for me to keep the relation with ECM."

Asked if listening back to the 1970 recording sparked nostalgic or visceral reaction these many years later, Andersen commented, "I think it is just a memory of some starting point for me being part of a quartet — playing freely yet structured and with interplay as a strong guideline, rather than a soloist with a rhythm section. The openness and quartet sound was just in my musical direction and also in the way it was recorded, it made the bass as an equal voice to the sax and guitar. The band was very democratic."

On *Afric Pepperbird*, the democratic ideals laid out in top-down fashion from leader Garbarek resulted in opening up select moments to feature each player. Andersen steps forward, as a solo voice, on the tunes "Mah-Jong" and "MYB." By his recollection, Anderson notes that "'Mah-Jong' happened there and then. Jan and Manfred had been downstairs for a cup of coffee and Terje, Jon and I were just jamming when they came back and Manfred said, 'That sounds great, let's record it.' So we improvised a bit and it was included on the record. For 'MYB' it came about because I just had practiced harmonics at the end of the fingerboard and this little melody came up. Jan and I did a version of it."

Touching on more pragmatic memories of the sessions, he recalled, "Most of the music was recorded the second evening. We recorded in the evening when the elevator in the building was less in use — the elevator had to stop when we recorded."

In terms of musical and attitudinal guideposts for the album's distinctive mix of muscle, freedom and impressionistic yearning, Andersen pointed out that the bandleader and influential musical theoretician George Russell "was living in Oslo at the time and both Jan and I had been to his lecture 'The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization.' We also played in his sextet at the time. The lecture had a great impact on me."

In its more livewire and raucous passages, the music on *Afric Pepperbird* runs counter to any stereotyped descriptor of a certain more refined and introspective "ECM sound." "I don't think any of us thought about this," Anderson says on the subject. "First of all, what you could call a stereotyped ECM music had not happened yet," he says with a soft laugh. "This was just how we played live at that time."

ECM is a label that prides itself on pristine sonic content and elegant packaging, and has only reluctantly yielded to advancing technological formats, whether the switch from vinyl to CDs in the '80s or giving in to the digital streaming revolution. With elegantly preserved vintage reissues such as these projects from the Garbarek annals, audiophiles and other purists are invited to savor these landmark albums in the form first presented to the world, in clean, vinyl format.

Count Andersen as one of the true believers in analog technology and other old-school values in recorded music.

"The digital world has made an impact on all record companies," he admits, but adds, "I like the older version better." *—Josef Woodard*

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BRUNO ZANARDO

"I want to inform myself to better convey ideas about nature and sustainability through my music," says Amaro Freitas.

Amaro Freitas' Brazilian Roots

ALTHOUGH BRAZILIAN PIANIST AMARO Freitas amply displayed his compositional brilliance and instrumental derring-do on three trio albums between 2016 and 2021, his solo recital last March, one that opened the 2023 Bergamo Jazz Festival, proved to be mind-blowing.

Freitas performed originals from his third date, *Sankofa* (Far Out), and individualistic interpretations of Wayne Shorter's "Footprints" and John Coltrane's "Giant Steps." His own pieces featured strong melodies narratively focused on Afro-Brazilian and indigenous dance and carnival traditions, upon which he improvised orchestrally with vocabulary culled from the jazz and Euro-classical canons and various folkloric dialects, tossing off complex polymetric passages, some at extreme velocities and deploying homegrown extended techniques.

As an example, on one piece, Freitas applied a shaker to different areas of the piano's exoskeleton and strings, which he'd prepared in real time with Amazonian seeds, clothespins and other objects, eliciting the sound of a sampled drum ensemble. On another, he addressed a wood-encased mbira that stood to the right of the piano bench, executing a brisk melodic right-hand line that he answered contrapuntally on the piano.

He morphed the "Footprints" refrain into a dense harmonic forest, carving a pathway with clearly articulated, jackhammered lines that evoked a pointillistic Cecil Taylor. He revisited the piano-as-hand-drum trope on "Giant Steps," caressing the melody with legato touch at a ballad tempo, gradually building to another Taylor-esque explosion, then decrescendoing to a crystalline theme restatement.

Four months later, Freitas and his breathe-as-one trio at the Amazonas played the Green Jazz Festival in Manaus, Brazil, a city of 2 million that lies adjacent to the dense Amazon forest at the conjunction of the Rivers Negro and Solimões that coalesce into the Amazon River, 2,870 miles west of his hometown, Recife, a city of 1.6 million on Brazil's Atlantic coast. After 50 minutes, he dismissed his bandmates, concluding the concert with a long, ritualistic solo piece.

In a post-concert interview (translated by Brazilian composer-saxophonist Felipe Salles), the 31-year-old pianist explained the new album's title, which references an Adinkra symbol depicting a backwards-facing bird in flight, a pungent metaphor for the notion of "going back to our roots to realize our potential to move forward." He first saw the image at an African market in Harlem back in 2019, while in the city for a trio gig at Dizzy's Club. It sparked within Freitas a consciousness that the music he'd grown up listening to in his father's evangelical church, where "a lot of African traditions had been erased or denied," had a direct connection to African antecedents.

It was well after midnight, but Freitas — who'd spent most of the afternoon in the jungle with a local ecologist — showed no signs of fatigue. He mentioned that the solo vignette foreshadowed his latest release, *Y'Y* (Psychic Hotline) (with Hamid Drake, Shabaka Hutchings, Jeff Parker and Brandee Younger as collaborators), inspired by a visit to Manaus in 2020 that connected him to the rituals, customs and spirits of the regional Sateré Mawé indigenous community.

"I want to inform myself to better convey ideas about nature and sustainability through my music," Freitas said. "Our culture in Brazil doesn't support the memory of the nation's pre-colonial culture. I want to be an artist who shows how potent this culture and heritage is and how it can connect with the world."

As Freitas spoke about his formative years, it was apparent that, from the beginning, he's extrapolated quotidian experience into notes and tones in a similarly immersive manner. Now 31, he began on piano at 11, when his father assigned him to switch from drums to play at church services. At 15, he entered the local conservatory. Strained finances forced him to drop out six months later, but he practiced assiduously on a keyboard, learning autodidactically via "different circles of people in Recife who brought me information on harmony, polyrhythms and so on." That year, after hearing a Chick Corea concert DVD, Freitas essayed his first efforts at composition.

"I was inspired by the depth of his concept, which has improvisation but also contains a long form that the musicians must learn deeply in order to connect — on the level of Jobim," he said. Over the ensuing years, his sense of improvisational possibility expanded as he absorbed albums by Keith Jarrett, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Herbie Hancock, Michel Petrucciani and Oscar Peterson.

Freitas worked odd jobs for several years to finance his musical studies. Eventually, he landed a long sinecure playing standards at Recife's Mingus Jazz Bar, while devoting off-hours to the compound-meter compositions that appear on his first album, the self-financed *Sangue Negro*. He spent quality time absorbing the rhythmic and textural worlds of Cecil Taylor and Thelonious Monk, practicing "six to eight hours a day, five days a week," he said. His trio wasn't keeping up, and his desire to refract his explorations into artistic practice prompted him to focus on the solo space and piano preparation.

He opines that these ministrations positioned him to connect to the energies exhibited by similarly ancient-to-future-oriented creative musicians like Hutchings, Drake, Parker and Younger, as Wayne Shorter did with Milton Nascimento on *Native Dancer,* or Pixinguinha with American jazz musicians in Paris a century ago. Freitas also admires such like-minded Brazilian elders as Moacir Santos (for "working out the candomble rhythms of the orishas in the structure of orchestration"), Hermeto Pascoal, Dom Salvador and Egberto Gismonti.

"It's important to me that the Brazilian artist is the protagonist of this work, and not the supporting actor, like Nascimento was on *Native Dancer*," Freitas said of *Y'Y*. For now, even as his international profile expands, he intends to remain based in Recife.

"I made an important point by breaking the myth that every successful musician either goes to São Paulo or to New York. For those who live in Recife, it brings forth a whole other possibility, a sense of worth." —*Ted Panken*

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"Einstein was a violinist, Max Planck was also a musician and Stefon Alexander plays saxophone," says Donald Harrison about the relationship between science and music.

Harrison's *Passion* Mixes Hard Swing, Trap Hip-Hop

"IF YOU DON'T LIVE IT, IT WON'T COME OUT of your horn."

That sage advice from Charlie Parker became Big Chief Donald Harrison's lodestar, even though Parker passed away before Harrison was even born.

"I realized that was the path I should be on," recalled the New Orleans-born saxophonist and composer, the scion of Big Chief Donald Harrison Sr. "I was already part of the roots culture of New Orleans music and Congo Square. So I went on a mission to play with as many masters of jazz as I could and see where that would take me."

His trajectory flew fast and far. At age 19, he started playing with Roy Haynes and introduced Big Apple jazzbos to New Orleans brass bands with New York Second Line. Miles Davis became an early mentor, as did Art Blakey, and Harrison's quest to explore the musical omniverse soon took him to Africa, South America, the Caribbean and beyond. Closer to home, he gleaned material from the radio and The Notorious BIG, his Brooklyn neighbor. But it wasn't until 2005, when he released *3D* (Fromp), that the NEA Jazz Master began recording a single song in several mix-and-match genres.

The Art Of Passion (Ropeadope), his new three-track EP, premiered Jan. 11 at New York's Town Hall with guest stars ranging from DJ Logic and Vernon Reid to Charles Tolliver and Arturo O'Farrill. Shortly afterward, Harrison sat down to discuss his musical journey and *Passion*'s mix of hard swing, trap hip-hop and jazz.

Cree McCree: *I love the title,* The Art Of Passion.
Donald Harrison: Yeah, passion comes in many forms. The recording shows a mirror image of two styles of music: hard swing that greats like what Coltrane and Miles Davis were doing in the '60s and the modern trap hip-hop young people came up with. Those two bookends merge in the middle track, so you can see the whole journey if you listen to the music.

McCree: *And you were living that journey, just like Bird advised. You were mentored by Miles and actually lived near Biggie Smalls in Brooklyn.*
Harrison: That's the part I'm always pinching myself about, being around some of the greatest people in the world. Biggie would come to my house every day to work on music and became the king of East Coast rap. If you type in "Notorious BIG quotes," you'll see all these messages of hope to young people hidden underneath his music. That if you work hard, you can achieve anything.

McCree: *You also learned a lot from the quantum physicist Stefon Alexander. How did that connection come about?*
Harrison: After I did a recording called *Quantum Leap*, I emailed him to ask about the idea of multiverses: that if they exist, each one would be different, but they would contain the same elements. We've stayed in touch and it's been a great marriage. Sometimes when we're talking, we come up with the same ideas. It's a little bit scary, but wonderful. Einstein was a violinist, Max Planck was also a musician and Stefon Alexander plays saxophone.

McCree: *Bingo.*
Harrison: Music fueled their finding new ways to look at science. In the universe, everything goes to its natural conclusion. If you see a tree blowing in the wind, it moves naturally because of the wind. Music is the same way. The great bassist Bill Lee, Spike Lee's father, would always say, be true to yourself. Be natural. When John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins were playing together, each stayed true to his realm.

McCree: *Why did you choose Ropeadope to continue your journey?*
Harrison: Because it embraces the totality of music that's out right now. It's open to new ideas. I've been trying to get other labels to look at releasing multi-genre music since my early days on Impulse. And they always looked at it from a marketing point of view: We're not gonna spend that much money to put all these songs into all these different marketplaces. But Ropeadope embraced the idea wholeheartedly.

McCree: *What do you hope listeners will take away from* The Art Of Passion*?*
Harrison: Well, I hope they enjoy all the music. That people who may not normally listen to hip-hop realize, OK, this is actually good music. And that people who mostly listen to hip-hop get a taste of jazz and see that jazz is something that they should add to their list of musical styles.

McCree: How does New Orleans fit into your musical equation?
Harrison: New Orleans is a root incubator for the world's music and the cultural home of jazz. Because if you play our traditional songs like "Handa Wanda," everyone from a 2-year-old to an 80-year-old knows those songs. All the social and economic strata, all of the races. The music and the culture ties us together as one. We all enjoy it and love it together." —*Cree McCree*

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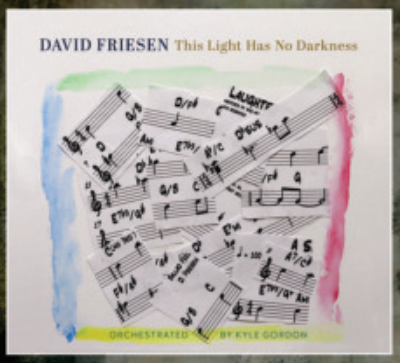

DAVID FRIESEN
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Trio with Chamber Orchestra

RANDY NAPOLEON
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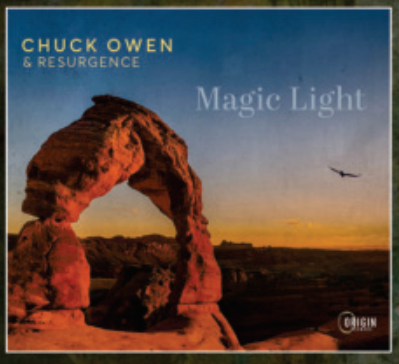

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MELANIE MOR

Mary Halvorson expanded her hollowbody guitar to match her imaginative foot-pedal-assisted forays at this year's NYC Winter Jazzfest.

NYC Winter Jazzfest at 20: Immediacy Meets Intensity

CRISSCROSSING DOZENS OF VENUES, IN multiple New York neighborhoods, presenting smart lineups and thoughtful creative events, this year's NYC Winter Jazzfest celebrated its 20th anniversary as an overwhelming success. Musicians both known and unknown, playing challenging music in unique configurations, gave this year's fest, held Jan. 10–18, a feeling of immediacy and intensity, a splintering of old ways in service to fresh ideas and bold imaginings.

Qualifier: If you expected standards played by a familiar quintet lineup polishing their best Mobley-Flanagan-Pass-Chambers-Taylor *spang-a-lang* swing-fest, you'd be woefully disappointed. But if your senses were open, your ears keen and your willingness to move engaged, joy would be yours.

The scope of this year's event was inspiring, entertaining and hopeful. Shows were remarkably positive, giving audiences more than their money's worth, perhaps more than they hoped for, more than past years' WJFs would have predicted.

While 2024 WJF offered more single performances than any one reporter could cover, including big names (Joe Lovano, David Murray, Shabaka Hutchings), big tributes (Ryuchi Sakamoto, Curtis Fowlkes, J Dilla) and "Jazz Talks" including "The Art of Being a Multi-Hyphenate" and "The Universality of Jazz," I stuck to lesser-knowns and what-ifs. The Manhattan and Brooklyn Marathon Nights and a trip to the revived Crown Hill Theatre in Crown Heights Brooklyn dominated.

Williamsburg's Superior Ingredients stretched the envelope starting with the duo of guitarist Mary Halvorson and drummer Tomas Fujiwara, the former expanding her hollowbody Johnny Smith model Guild guitar to match her brain-altering, imaginative foot-pedal-assisted forays, the latter matching her inventiveness with full set shuddering. What began as dissembled and clinical culminated in beautiful dual waves of rhythm and melody.

Drummer Mark Guiliana followed with a solo set at Superior Ingredients. Beginning on jazz kit, Guiliana moved to playing various floor-mounted bells, cymbals and electronics, providing sparse piano accompaniment to a recording of broadcaster Vin Scully, then a full-on Bonham-meets-Squarepusher drum assault to projected video complement. An audience participation segment led to a full-set Guiliana crescendo. Next, quirky and illuminating, saxophonist Matana Roberts delivered a beautiful solo set on soprano, interspersed with thoughtful spoken word observations ("We don't deserve dogs").

One night, I barely made it to Le Poisson Rouge on Bleecker Street in time to catch a sparkling set by harpist Brandee Younger (with bassist Rashaan Carter and drummer Allan Mednard), trailed by an inspired, surprising performance from pianist/vocalist Samora Pinderhughes. The pianist's 10-voice choir took the subterranean crowd to church with gospel invocations and impassioned spiritual pleadings — Donny Hathaway meets The Edwin Hawkins Singers.

At City Winery, found on West Side Highway and 11th Avenue, the first truly revelatory WJF performance (for this reporter) was delivered by saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins and his profoundly shapeshifting octet. Vocalists Alyssa McDoom and Ganavya Doraiswamy, with Wilkins, were the music's stars, with support from pianist Micah Thomas and drummer Kweku Sumbrey. Wilkins' spellbinding set wove intense improvisations like a single organism, propelled by Doraiswamy and McDoom's remarkable vocal incantations, which elevated the music to other galaxies, other dimensions.

Nublu and RadioNublu, in Manhattan's East Village, offered jazz, sorta-jazz and definitely-not-jazz for WJF, six nights total. One evening I caught an early set by Mozambique vocal/bassist Natalie Greffel before stumbling six blocks in the snow to hear Pedro Martins & Friends at Radionublu. Playing guitar like a reincarnated Allan Holdsworth, supported by an agile quartet including fiery drummer Justin Brown, Martins created a beautiful, kinetic rendition of Joe Zawinul's "Young And Fine" before soaring through the stratosphere with original material. These guys played contemporary jazz-with-beats free of cliche, rife with inventiveness and tremendous skill.

Two nights later, I returned to Nublu to hear keyboardist BIGYUKI as he and his trio with guitarist Randy Runyon and heroic drummer Charles Haynes threw down salty chunks of slippery funk rock, created from shards of '90s block-rocking electronic beats, anthemic guitar solos and Haynes' slam-your-head drumming majesty. BIGYUKI alternately punished and romanced his Korg keyboard stack, recalling '80s funk trio Cameo one second, Mahavishnu-worthy Jan Hammer the next.

On Sunday, I took a train to Crown Heights. There, the circa-1900, multipurpose Crown Hill Theatre presented "A Night At The East." This performance drew on jazz past/spiritual future, as the rhythm section of drummer Billy Hart, bassist Luke Stewart, keyboardist Julius Rodriquez and percussionist Kweku Sumbrey churned a swelling backdrop. Saxophonists David Murray and Gary Bartz joined with reedsmiths Nicole Mitchell and Shabaka Hutchings, weaving call-and-response lines, ascending like birds.

Over a 25-minute performance, prefaced by a free-ish trumpet-and-drums duo, the ensemble followed the natural sound-course of spiritual praise, the music rising and falling in intensity. Bartz enunciated freely over Hart's pulsing groove, his solo ending with "A Love Supreme" refrains. Murray followed, extolling muscularity, mounting quavers, plunging tenor squalls.

Back at Nublu, a crowd poured in to hear singer/songwriter Genevieve Artadi. The tiny artist sang queasy melodies over manic-grooved pop, driven hard by drummer Louis Cole, keyboardist Isis Giraldo and Pedro Martins on guitar. Artadi's hyper-robo sounds reminded me of '70s new wave act Missing Persons, amped up on steroids and a fiendish click track. The crowd loved it, brows bouncing, feet squiggling. Jazz-not, future hits, yes. *—Ken Miccalef*

Jean-Philippe Allard: The Artwork of Jazz

IN DECEMBER 2022, FRENCH RECORD EXECutive Jean-Philippe Allard launched a new label, Artwork, with the release of *The Source*, a nonchalantly brilliant solo recital by piano veteran Kenny Barron. It earned a Grammy nomination. Over the next 12 months, Allard augmented his catalog with well-received albums by Gen-Y New York pianist Sullivan Fortner (*Solo/Game*) and Gen-Z pianist Micah Thomas (*Reveal*), while representing France with jazz-adjacent saxophonist-vocalist Oan Kim's Oan Kim & the Dirty Jazz and Edouard Penne's Génération Django, a 21st century gypsy jazz unit.

In January, Allard spoke with DownBeat during New York's NYC Winter Jazzfest, where he talent-scouted singers and checked in with Barron, Fortner and Thomas about their respective 2024 releases, all distinctively different from their immediate predecessors.

"I always worked with great singers, and I want that to continue," Allard said over lunch, recalling long associations with Abbey Lincoln, Shirley Horn, Juliette Gréco and Dee Dee Bridgewater. "Even when I'm working with non-jazz and pop on the side, it's singer-songwriters. I think jazz musicians are never better than when they play with singers. A song is not only chords. It's about a story. It makes a big difference."

The "non-jazz and pop" remark referenced Allard's clients in Le Bureau des Artistes, the management company he established in 2017 after departing Universal Music France, which, in 1999, purchased Polygram (his first corporate employer) in 2007, appointed him CEO of Publishing and, in 2014, green-lighted his reactivation of Impulse! Records.

Under his stewardship, Impulse! released Fortner's first two albums and a roots-to-avant project by Henry Butler and Steven Bernstein; albums by Barron, Randy Weston and Rodney Kendrick, each a frequent contributor to Allard's 1990s Gitanes Jazz imprint (which also released game-changers by Hank Jones, Charlie Haden and J.J. Johnson); consequential albums by John Scofield and an all-star trio consisting of Jean-Luc Ponty, Biréli Lagrène and Stanley Clarke; and the albums that introduced Snarky Puppy and Ibrahim Maalouf to a global audience.

For his new endeavor, Allard joined forces with Mehdi Guebli, a well-connected A&R manager specializing in French rap (Guebli reported to Allard at Universal) and 50% stakeholder PIAS, a large independent distributor with a substantial footprint in indie rock and classical. By 2022, he was restless to return to his first love. He told his PIAS colleagues, "One of these days I might want to start a new jazz label." To his surprise, they agreed.

"Of course, my first call was to Kenny," Allard said. "When you're working with

YANN ORHAN

"I still believe in making albums, not just tracks; I'm trying to do the best record I can do," says Jean-Philippe Allard about his work at Artwork Records.

Universal, it's easier to get an artist — even one you're close to — than when you start an independent. But Kenny said, 'Let's work together.'"

The relationship between Allard and Barron began at the cusp of the '90s, when Allard paid Stan Getz $250,000 for tapes capturing his quartet with Barron, Rufus Reid and Victor Lewis at Copenhagen's Café Montmartre in July 1987. Those tapes were for *Serenity* and *Anniversary!* and an unreleased, "not unforgettable" 1981 studio album titled *Billy Highstreet Samba*. Getz, in the late stages of terminal lung cancer, decided to eschew royalties and take the money up-front.

"It helped my credibility within the company," Allard said. "Stan said, 'Send the money and I'll send the tapes,' like a hustler. Everybody thought I was crazy, that he'd keep the money, and I'd never see anything. My logic was: Perhaps, but he's a great musician — he wants this album to be released, so he'll send me the tapes and that's it. We recouped by the second release, and then it was pure profit. I offered Stan to change the deal and pay royalties, but he said, 'No, you took the risk, and you did great.'"

In February and March 1991, a few months before his death, Getz recorded for Allard on Abbey Lincoln's *You Gotta Pay The Band* with Hank Jones and Charlie Haden, and on Helen Merrill's *Just Friends*, and booked a duo week with Barron at Café Montmartre that generated the co-billed, commercially successful *People Time*. A year later, at Barron's request, Allard recruited Brazilian guitarist Toninho Horta for the first of their 10 collaborations, a program of Barron's Brazil-oriented originals (*Sambao*). In 1994, Barron embraced Allard's suggestion to play trio with Haden and Roy Haynes on *Wanton Spirit*. In 1995, Allard green-lighted Barron's proposal to do a plugged-in duo with percussionist Minu Cinelu (*Swamp Sally*).

"Jean-Philippe was open to everything I suggested, and he was cool if I didn't accept a suggestion of his," Barron said. "I love working with him. For this solo album, he found an old, ornate theater with a great piano and fantastic sound — just me, him and the engineer. As always, he told me, 'Whatever you want to do.' He's the best producer I've ever had."

"It's wonderful to see someone who's committed to trying to understand your truth," Kendrick cosigned. "I watched Jean-Philippe function as a producer around strong, socially involved people like Abbey, Randy Weston and Charlie Haden, and not only get along with them, but be accepted as part of the family."

Kendrick connected Fortner to Allard in 2013, bringing him to a memorial service for a mutual friend. Following Kendrick and Weston on a "little bitty keyboard," Fortner rendered "Danny Boy." "What he played had so much depth, was so moving and simple, which to me is a sign of greatness," Allard said.

Allard held to his hands-off policy when Fortner made *Aria* and *Moments Preserved* for Impulse! in 2014 and 2017, respectively. He offered more input five years later, when Fortner presented him with *Solo Game*, which juxtaposes a suite of electronic-and-percussion-heavy vignettes with solo piano. He'd been shopping it to various labels for a year, and found no takers.

"Sullivan is a great artist, and his label should go with what he wants to do," Allard said. "I said, 'I will release it.' Then he told me he wanted to release the two albums together, which didn't make sense to me. I tried to convince him it wouldn't be good for either of us."

He was persuaded after a conference call with Fortner and his musical and life partner, Cécile McLorin Salvant, who firmly explained the logic of a single release. Fortner said: "Jean-Philippe told us, 'You'll really have to work at this. You have to come with artwork concepts, social media situations and liner notes that tie everything together.' We did that. I think he was shocked by the response. I definitely was.

"Jean-Philippe's level of trust from artists is rare with record producers. He's willing to be the pillow if the artist falls. He provides a platform for us to be individuals, incorporate our personal experiences and viewpoints, without trying to taint or tarnish it. He's not about holding on to the tradition. He understands that music is spirited, comes from a living source, so it's constantly flowing and evolving, not something stagnant intended to take you into some weird time warp."

"You have to be ambitious, but reasonable," Allard said. "For a lot of reasons, I think the industry could be easier a few years from now. I still believe in making albums, not just tracks; I'm trying to do the best record I can do."

—Ted Panken

BÉLA FLECK

REIMAGINING *RHAPSODY*

BY BILL MILKOWSKI | PHOTO BY HAZEL COONAGH

Over the course of his remarkably eclectic, multiple-Grammy-winning career — one that stretches across four decades — banjo virtuoso Béla Fleck has boldly, almost defiantly, taken his five-stringed instrument to places where no banjo player has gone before. Consider this globe-trotting itinerary: 2023's Grammy-winning *As We Speak* (India), 2020's *The Ripple Effect* (Africa), 2009's Grammy-winning *Throw Down Your Heart* (Africa) and 1996's *Tabula Rasa* (India and China).

Add in his contemporary jazz excursions with his Flecktones and love of old-timey Appalachian music, which he performs in duets with wife Abigail Washburn, his various one-on-one encounters with Chick Corea, his deep immersion into the classical canon on 2001's *Perpetual Motion* (which won a Grammy for Best Classical Crossover Album) and two banjo concertos that he's written and performed with symphony orchestras, and you get a sense of the sheer breadth of his musical range.

HAZEL COONAGH

"It's not like Bach, where you had better play the notes correctly," Fleck says. "In the case of *Rhapsody*, it had been done so many ways and with the blessing of George."

He's even collaborated and recorded with such disparate artists as The Chieftains, Bootsy Collins and the Blind Boys of Alabama. Yet, he remains steadfastly committed to his roots, having recently won a Grammy in the bluegrass category for his 2021 album, *My Bluegrass Heart*.

With *Rhapsody In Blue*, his interpretation of George Gershwin's enduringly popular marriage of classical form and jazz improvisation, Fleck dives headlong into untested waters once again. Performed with the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Eric Jacobsen, his recording of *Rhapsody* is set to coincide with the premiere of the original work exactly 100 years ago at Aeolian Hall in New York City on Feb. 12, 1924. And because the piece itself relatively short, he fleshes out his latest release with clever variations on that familiar theme, including "Rhapsody In Blue(grass)," a spirited throwdown with players from his all-star My Bluegrass Heart ensemble (flat picking guitarist Bryan Sutton, fiddler Michael Cleveland, mandolinist Sierra Hull, dobro ace Justin Moses and bassist Mark Schatz), and "Rhapsody In Blue(s)," his down-home homage to Gershwin's hallmark piece, recorded with his former New Grass Revival bandmate Jerry Douglas on dobro and Nashville super picker Sam Bush on mandolin (both of whom had also appeared on Fleck's first solo album, 1979's *Crossing The Tracks* on Rounder) and with longtime Flecktones bandmate Victor Wooten on electric bass.

An added treat on Fleck's *Rhapsody* release is the inclusion of two solo pieces: the ragtime novelty number "Rialto Ripples," written by Gershwin in 1916, and the previously unknown "Unidentified Piece For Banjo," discovered in the Library of Congress by Dr. Ryan Banagale, musicology professor, author of *Arranging Gershwin* and college chum of Washburn, the clawhammer banjoist, singer and songwriter.

Born Béla Anton Leoš Fleck (his name is a composite of Hungarian composer Béla Bartók, composer Anton Webern and Czech composer Leoš Janáček) on July 10, 1958, on New York's Upper West Side, he was drawn to banjo at a young age after hearing Earl Scruggs play the theme song for the television show *The Beverly Hillbillies* and also hearing Eric Weissberg's "Dueling Banjos," a hit instrumental song from the movie *Deliverance* that spent four weeks at No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 100 in early 1973.

He received his first banjo from his grandfather Morris at age 15 and later took private lessons from Erik Darling, Marc Horowitz and Tony Trischka, the latter who would become his mentor and an early collaborator. After graduating from the High School of Music & Art in upper Manhattan, Fleck moved to Boston in late 1976 and became a member of the group Tasty Licks while still a teenager.

"It was my first full-time professional band and my first experience touring band situation. We went all over New England and even south to D.C., Kentucky and Tennessee. Our first album (1978's *Tasty Licks* on Rounder) was pretty progressive, and it was my first time making a record." The following year, Fleck released his solo debut, *Crossing The Tracks*, launching an ongoing investigation into the possibilities of his instrument that continues to this day.

Aside from his recently released *Rhapsody In Blue*, Fleck also produced another duo project with Chick Corea, which the two recorded remotely during the pandemic. Entitled *Remembrance*, it is scheduled for a May release and represents some of the legendary pianist's last recorded work. DownBeat caught up with Fleck just prior to his whirlwind tour of Europe with My Bluegrass Heart and the concurrent release of his *Rhapsody In Blue* on Thirty Tigers, a subsidiary of Sony Music Nashville.

BILL MILKOWSKI: *Because you have continually put your instrument into musical situations where it seemingly doesn't belong, it's clear that you love an epic challenge.*

BÉLA FLECK: I do. And it's almost like a civil rights effort for me with the banjo, because I love it so much and I'm very curious about it. Ever since I first heard the banjo, it was just so special to me. And then when people were laughing at it … boy, that really bugged me. From the time I was 5 or 6, seeing *Deliverance* and *The Beverly Hillbillies* and even *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Hee Haw,* all of the images of the banjo that I saw were somehow connected to a certain aspect of banjo playing, which is very special as well. But it was just a tiny piece of what the banjo really was, and it had taken over in people's minds as the whole true picture. It's so much easier to knock something down to a little stereotype than to look at what it truly is.

And when you look at the banjo, it's like … it's the history of the world! I mean, it's slavery, it's the birth of the blues, the birth of American music. It's a continuation of African music, a melting pot, a meeting ground. Plus, it just happens to sound great to some of us. And I think a lot of the people who go, "Oh, I just can't handle the banjo," are people who drank the Kool-Aid of the stereotype. They're associating it with the stereotypical images that were portrayed because they didn't see images of Black people playing the banjo or even remember that Louis Armstrong had a banjo in his first Hot Five band. That was the instrument that was around from the start of jazz. Not guitar, not even piano; the banjo was there. So for me, it's always been irritating. Because, I guess at the age that I got into it, and being a New Yorker and growing up in the '60s with Martin Luther King and the Kennedys and the kind of world that we were hoping to make … I was inspired by all of that. So that's why I say it's almost like a civil rights thing for me.

MILKOWSKI: *In your liner notes for* Rhapsody In Blue *you reminisced about your Uncle Steve taking you and your older brother Louie to the Thalia Theater, that great art deco movie house on the Upper West Side in Manhattan that specialized in Hollywood classics and foreign films. And you saw the 1945 Hollywood biopic of George Gershwin starring Robert Alda, Alan Alda's father.*

FLECK: Yeah, it was a cool little theater to go to when I was growing up, and it was just four blocks from my house. It was on 95th and Broadway, and we were on 100th and West End Avenue. And I recently found out that Alan Lomax [the famed ethnomusicologist] lived in that same building, and I never knew it. But I was young enough to be impressed by that movie — his life story and then the sadness of him getting sick [Gershwin died of a brain

tumor at age 38, just eight years before the film was released]. It was all so poignant and so powerful for me. But I haven't had the nerve to go look at it since all this *Rhapsody* stuff I've been doing because I kind of like how it fits in my memory. But recently, somebody sent me a clip of the performance of *Rhapsody In Blue* from that movie, and sure enough, there's a banjo right in the center of the orchestra.

MILKOWSKI: *In the 1930 movie* King of Jazz *about bandleader Paul Whiteman, there's a performance of* Rhapsody In Blue *midway through the film with Gershwin himself playing piano. He was a technical monster, from what I could tell.*

FLECK: Yeah. And having thoroughly studied *Rhapsody*, from my understanding of the piano, I'd say it's a very two-handed part. There's lots of things that go in opposite directions, with both hands working really hard. And I simply couldn't do them on the banjo. It wasn't possible. I was either going to have to do it with two banjos or let some of these things go. And then I had to decide whether the piece was still good enough as a banjo feature, doing without all of the things that a piano could do. And finally I decided that it if George was OK with Larry Adler playing it on the harmonica [in 1934, Adler played *Rhapsody In Blue* for Gershwin, who exclaimed, "The goddamn thing sounds as if I wrote it for you!"], I think he'd probably be OK with my version.

MILKOWSKI: *Tackling* Rhapsody In Blue *is another one of those epic challenges that you seem to enjoy.*

FLECK: Absolutely. And it's really fun to hear those parts coming out of my banjo. It's fun to be that excited about something that you didn't write, which maybe sounds egotistical, but there's a tendency to over-focus on your own music. Sometimes it's great, but sometimes it can trap you in your own mediocrity. I'm in the situation where there really isn't music written for the banjo that suits the way I play, so I have to write it myself. But when I do get to go learn something like *Rhapsody* or classical things by Bach, Chopin, Debussy and Tchaikovsky, like I learned for *Perpetual Motion*, or play Chick's music or whoever … it's really a pleasure to play great music. And if you pick someone else's music to play, you've chosen it out of thousands. So if you're going to do someone else's music, it's best that you're crazy about it, as I was crazy about *Rhapsody In Blue*.

MILKOWSKI: *What was the initial spark for you wanting to do* Rhapsody In Blue *on banjo?*

FLECK: I suppose it goes back more than 20 years. My wife, Abby, went to Colorado College, where she gave the commencement speech in 1999. And she had an old school pal who is now a professor there named Ryan Banagale. Turns out he wrote a book called *Arranging Gershwin*, which tells the whole story of *Rhapsody In Blue*, from its genesis to the writing of it to all the different arrangements of it. Ryan came to hear Abby's commencement speech and afterwards he gave me a copy of his book. It was almost like a dissertation, but it was so good and it was a fascinating read. And also very inspiring, in that it made me realize that there's a lot of different ways to skin that particular piece. It's not like Bach, where you had better play the notes correctly. In the case of *Rhapsody*, it had been done so many ways and with the blessing of George.

MILKOWSKI: *How much time did you actually spend woodshedding on* Rhapsody*?*

FLECK: If we're talking about the piano part, I started fairly early in the pandemic, by May of 2020 or somewhere in there. It was like a fun side project with no expectation, and I just kept on working at it. I spent more time on it than anything I can remember. But it was a process of trying things and discarding them, sometimes spending up to a week figuring out how to finger each measure. Sibelius [music notation software] saved me a lot of time, because with it I can transfer things from standard notation to banjo tablature, then work with the tablature

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TAYLOR CROTHERS

Fleck has another project recorded with the late Chick Corea due out in May.

'til I get the right fingerings.

It's a big help because I don't read well. When I first got *Rhapsody* into Sibelius it took three banjo staves for me to even understand what the piano part was doing. And I worked on each measure over the course of the year. And I resisted as hard as I could putting any bluegrass in there because I was trying not to make a bluegrass version of it. What I wanted to do was really learn the music because I loved it. That was my goal.

At a certain point, I had to give up because there were certain things where I had to say, "OK, this can't be done, so what can I do now?" You'll hear some places where I had to changes things ever so slightly or change an order of a note or hit a note early and then glissando to other chords where it's supposed to be a block chord. I just had to figure it out and use my own sense of what sounded good. And in the end, I had to get more and more brutal about what I couldn't do, because some passages were impossible to play on the banjo. It was just not going to happen.

MILKOWSKI: *Just the idea of trying to transpose 10-fingered chords from the piano onto the banjo seems daunting.*

FLECK: Well, if you think about Chick Corea or Herbie Hancock, they leave a lot of space in their voicings, and it's not as overwhelming as somebody who plays with very dense voicings like Gershwin does on *Rhapsody*. That's just not possible on banjo. I just can't do it. I don't have the strings, I don't have the fingers, so you just have to start making decisions. And as you start developing the piece, you kind of forget what you're used to hearing and you get into what you are hearing. And that's the great thing about live performances, you take people on a journey. It doesn't have to be like something else they heard. It's not supposed to be.

MILKOWSKI: *Your "Rhapsody In Blue(grass)" seems reverent yet also very personal.*

FLECK: It turned out so much better than I expected, so much so that it justified the pun in the title. Since the orchestra piece is only about 18 or 19 minutes long I had to come up with something else to fill out the record. And I was under a pressing deadline because I really wanted to get the album released right on the 100th anniversary of the Aeolian Hall show. So I started messing around with this idea of a bluegrass version of *Rhapsody* with Bryan Sutton and I asked him to approach it like the great flat picker Tony Rice would, in that contemporary bluegrass rhythm style.

Then it was a race to the finish line to see if we could find a way to teach the piece to the members of My Bluegrass Heart band, who I was going out on the road with for two one-week periods in the summer. We ended up working on it in hotel rooms after gigs and before sound checks. Then we had one day off on the second week of the tour and just went into Thundering Sky Studio in Maine and recorded it in an afternoon. It's just a testament to how great those musicians are. They're all great session players who are really good at making stuff sound good, and they made my somewhat dumb idea sound like it was a great idea.

MILKOWSKI: *You also got your longtime collaborators Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas and Victor Wooten to play on "Rhapsody In Blue(s)," another adaptation of the famous Gershwin piece where you're bending strings big-time.*

FLECK: There's a fella, a blues guitarist back up in Bowling Green named Kenny Lee Smith. New Grass Revival used to play up there at his club all the time and Kenny would take me aside and say, "Now Béla, you've got to pluck the banjo … like this!" And he'd grab the string between his thumb and forefinger and take it back and pull it off the neck, then let it snap back to the neck so it would go … *pank!* I always thought that was really cool, and I used that technique on a tune called "Flight Of The Cosmic Hippo," the title cut from the Flecktones' second album in 1991.

And that became like a signature sound. But you can't do it very fast because you can't do fast notes in a row when you have to grab the string for every note. But if a song is slow enough and you can spank every note, then it works great. So that's what struck me when I was thinking of doing a blues version of *Rhapsody*. Initially, I got in touch with Keb' Mo', who's a friend of mine. He was too busy to do it so I got Sam and Jerry and we just started messing around with it. The question was, "Is there a way to play this as a little Southern blues?" And that string-snapping technique was the first thing I tried. And it gave it a different sound and a different tempo.

MILKOWSKI: *At some point in your journey with* Rhapsody In Blue, *Chick Corea came into the picture, if only tangentially. How did that happen?*

FLECK: We were on tour in Europe in 2017 and he gets a phone call from the classical pianist Lang Lang, who was supposed to open the Carnegie Hall series that year with a performance of *Rhapsody In Blue*. But he was recovering from tendonitis in his right hand and he asked Chick if he would come play the right hand part of *Rhapsody* with him. And during our tour, Chick was mulling it over out loud in the bus. And so we're chatting about it and I said, "Chick, you can do anything you want with this piece because I read this book, *Arranging Gershwin*, and it's really ripe for reimagining. You could really take some liberties with it." Like he needed me to tell him that!

So during our tour, I would be coming to sound check and Chick would be there early practicing *Rhapsody*, and he'd say, "Hey, man, I think this is what George was trying to do with this section." And for what he called "the Cuban section" toward the end of the piece, he'd say, "I

think George was trying to do a montuno here." He was thinking as a composer, of course. And he not only did that performance at Carnegie Hall with Lang Lang [on Oct. 4, 2017], he ended up with this really fabulous live version of it [recorded on Nov. 29, 2018, with Orchestra da Camera Della Sardegnathe] that you hear on his album *Sardinia* [Candid] that came out last year. I only found out just recently that he had even recorded or performed the piece as a whole. I thought he had just done it with Lang Lang. But I heard his version of *Rhapsody*, and I was just thrilled. It's so "Chick."

MILKOWSKI: *How did you find this unnamed solo banjo piece by Gershwin that appears on your* Rhapsody*?*

FLECK: Ryan Banagale, the Gershwin scholar who I had met at my wife's commencement speech in 1999, came to the opening gala of *Rhapsody In Blue* on Sept. 9, 2023. That was the first time I played it with the Nashville Symphony with their star conductor Giancarlo Guerrero. The day afterwards, Ryan and I were chatting about it and he said, "Well, what else are you going to put on the record?" And I told him I was thinking of doing some of Gershwin's solo piano pieces.

Then a month or so later he got in touch with me and said, "Hey, I found something at the Library of Congress. It's this unidentified Gershwin piece. It has no name, it's not even registered. But it's written in George's handwriting. And it's a solo banjo piece." So he sent it to me and it wasn't very fleshed out, just the main line. The whole first half had almost no chords written in, but it was pretty obvious what the chords ought to be in there for that time period. It was a little bit quirky but just a cool little tune. So I quickly learned that tune and it became another gift from Ryan to me.

MILKOWSKI: *So, that gala performance with the Nashville Symphony got the ball rolling, but you ended up recording* Rhapsody *with the Virginia Symphony Orchestra.*

FLECK: Yes, that initial gig became the thing that forced me to make decisions about the piece, because I had to have it ready to perform for real in front of a sold-out crowd of Nashville's community. It wasn't even in a small town off the beaten track, which is where I usually like to break in new stuff. So it was a lot of pressure, but it worked out.

Two weeks after that rather exciting debut of the piece with Nashville Symphony, I was in Norfolk recording it the Virginia Symphony Orchestra with my good friend Eric Jacobsen conducting. Eric had recently worked with my buddy Edgar Meyer [bassist and frequent collaborator who appeared on 2023's *As We Speak* with Fleck, tabla maestro Zakir Hussain and bansuri player Rakesh Chaurasia] on recording all of his bass concertos with Chris Thile producing. Eric and the orchestra did a wonderful job, and we got it done in plenty of time to meet the deadline for 100th anniversary of *Rhapsody In Blue*.

MILKOWSKI: *You've described yourself as "very self-critical." How has that helped you in your career?*

FLECK: There's that saying: "Sometimes perfection is the enemy of excellence," where you try so hard to be perfect that you can't get to "good." These days I'm trying to do better at not using self-hate to motivate me. I'm trying to be more like, "Hey, let's just do better and be really positive." But it used to be a lot of self-loathing. So on some level I didn't think I was that good, and I had to prove it over and over and over again. And it actually ended up giving me a lot of juice, a lot of power to push forward.

But I'm in a happy place now. I'm in a lovely relationship, have lovely kids and life is good. So it's not like I have to stand around being dark. But sometimes you some get some gifts from unexpected quarters. **DB**

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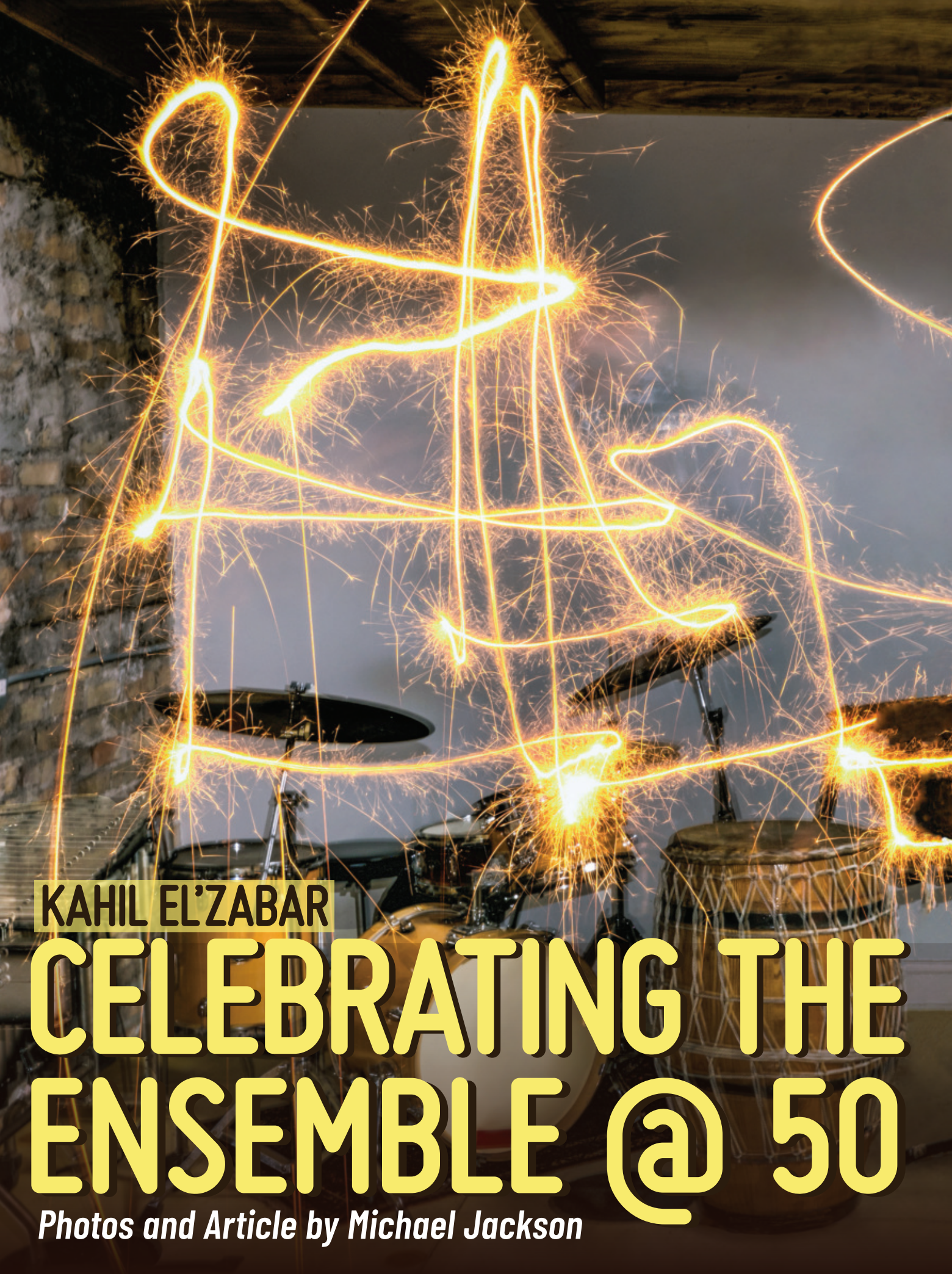
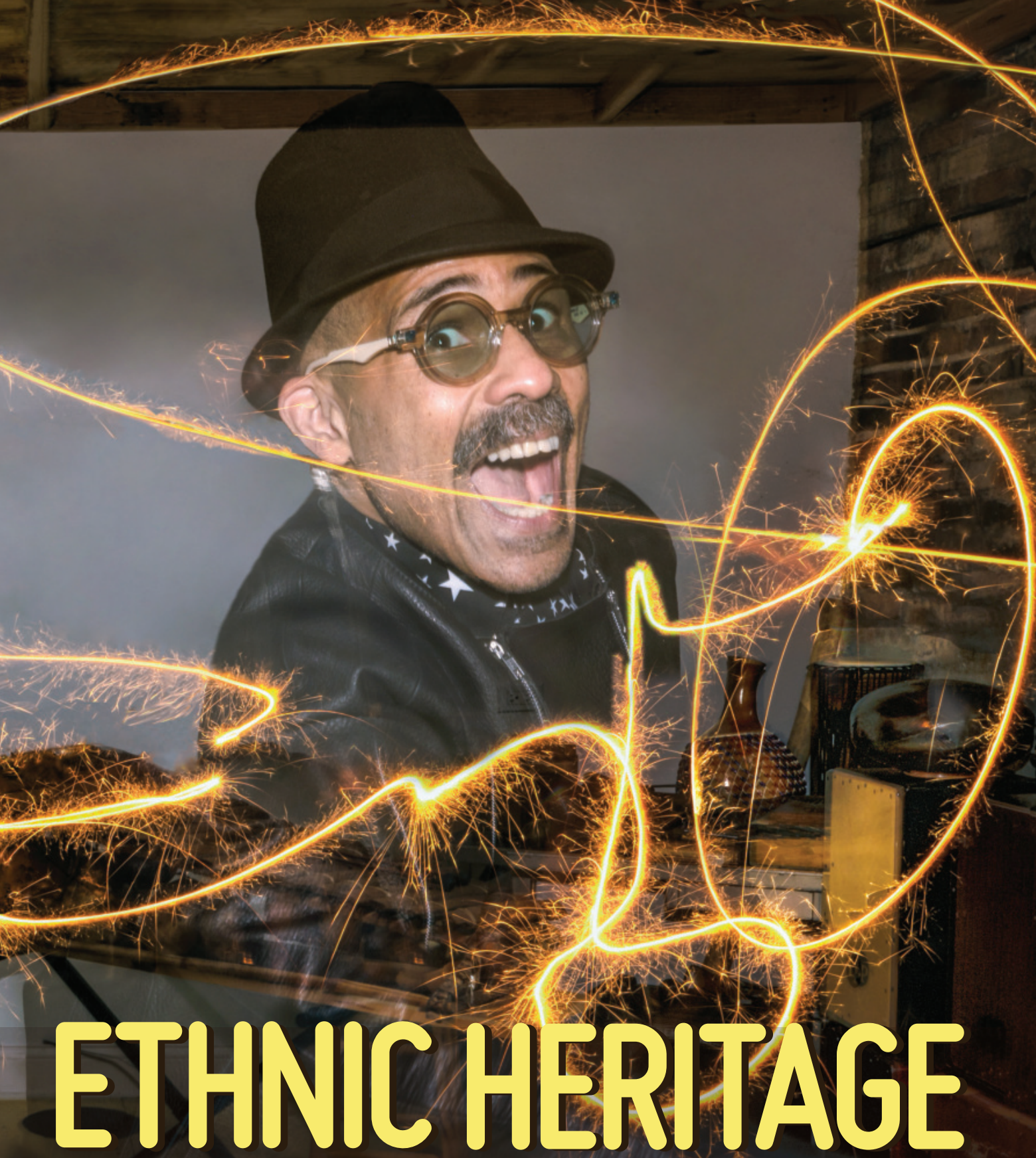


KAHIL EL'ZABAR

CELEBRATING THE ENSEMBLE @ 50

Photos and Article by Michael Jackson



ETHNIC HERITAGE

The occasion needed some fire. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of his Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, percussionist, cultural torchbearer and bandleader Kahil El'Zabar sat for a photo shoot in his expansive creative workspace in Chicago's Little Village neighborhood. It's a space he shares with his partner, installation artist Lucy Slivinski, and art served as the perfect kindling for the proceedings.

Members of the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble at a taping for a recent television appearance, from left, James Sanders, Kahil El'Zabar, Corey Wilkes, Ishmael Ali and Alex Harding.

The inspiration came from Gjon Mili's 1949 images of Picasso painting in light in a ceramics studio. After all, El'Zabar's unapologetic stance as a freestanding artist isn't a million miles from Pablo, both blazing iconoclastic trails.

In honor of the anniversary, the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble has released *Open Me–A Higher Consciousness Of Sound And Spirit*, which serves as El'Zabar's sixth release for Spirit Muse (chasing up last year's tribute to Don Cherry, Spirit Gatherer). It's his second release on the label with the Ensemble, which (embracing shifting personnel and 17 releases) has toured every February during Black History Month.

Open Me bespeaks El'Zabar's candor, a willingness to offer vulnerability or swagger. He's the proverbial open book, which has, at times, gotten him into hot water, as exposed in the dubious but candid documentary *Be Known* (2015) where ill-advised choices in his personal life bit back harshly just as he was riding high, curating a successful cross-cultural series at Steppenwolf Theatre, teaching an influential interdisciplinary course at the University of Illinois and programming the ambitious African Festival of the Arts in his hometown of Chicago.

But his darkest days are long behind (at his lowest, he spent a month in jail in 2007 on a child-support felony), and throughout those travails, barring one pandemic year, he never failed to find work for the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble.

Now 70, El'Zabar vigorously flouts seniority. He carries his tall frame with a confident gait, ever sartorial (he designed stageware for cohorts Pharoah Sanders, Joseph Jarman, Malachi Favors, even Freda Payne and Nina Simone), the shades a longstanding shield from junkie bandleaders of his youth, who'd otherwise deem him unhip for not partaking (his father, Big Cliff Blackburn, was a cop). And when he plays a trap set, he attacks the drums like a teenager, never holding back.

In February, at Chicago's The Promontory, he inaugurated a marathon of one-nighters with trumpeter Corey Wilkes, a long-term comrade, and baritone saxophonist Alex Harding, a relative newbie (connected through Ensemble alumnus Joe Bowie's band Defunkt) who's been with the group for seven years. Additionally, on selected dates the group has been augmented by the inclusion of violinist James Sanders and cellist Ishmael Ali.

At The Promontory gig, rather than coming out hot, the Ensemble built slow, the twin horns panned either side of El'Zabar atop cajon, commenced sotto voce. The chamber elements of this edition generate a meditative vibe. This salutary aspect undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of *A Time For Healing* (2021) a Grammy-nominated quartet session now in it's fourth pressing, and is evident on the somewhat doleful "Can You Find A Place?" from *Open Me* with the tolling pendulum of amplified kalimba, ankle bell rattle, slow lowing of strings, muted trumpet and bluesy baritone saxophone.

The album and live set feature mantra compositions from the breadth of the Ensemble's long arc, including El'Zabar's "Return Of The Lost Tribe," "Great Black Music" and the perennial "Ornette."

"I wrote that in the early '90s," recalls El'Zabar about the latter, in conversation at his home office and studio, surrounded by percussion, piano, West African balafon, vibraphones and self-made wall art. "I first recorded it with David Murray and Olu Dara on *Jug-A-Lug* [DIW, 1994]. They say *Kind Of Blue* was the biggest jazz record, but Ornette's *The Shape Of Jazz To Come* might be the most influential. Ornette found a completely new voice, accepted ridicule and judgment, yet pursued dreams of honest expression. That's what I want with my music."

Speaking of Coleman's legacy, *Spirit Gatherer* featured the son of his collaborator Don Cherry, David Ornette, who passed after a sold-out 2022 Ethnic Heritage Ensemble tribute to Cherry in London. "Three hours after standing ovations at the Barbican, happy he'd done his thing for his dad, he died," reflects El'Zabar.

A number of Ensemble personnel have transitioned, including Joseph Jarman, Kalaparusha Maurice McIntyre, Malachi Favors, Steve Colson and "Light" Henry Huff. The latter was a multi-reedist and naturopath, a Renaissance man whose cross-genre attitude to all music, like Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians cofounders Phil Cohran and Richard Abrams, impressed the 20-something El'Zabar.

He was eager to make an impact in Europe as had earlier AACM explorers in Paris during the '60s. Huff and another Chicago saxophonist/clarinetist, Edward Wilkerson, rehearsed with El'Zabar, kit drummer Ben Montgomery and bassist Yosef Ben Israel in Huff's dingy basement at 42nd and Langley.

But Ben Israel balked at El'Zabar's transatlantic odyssey because there were no ostensible gigs booked, and he was still in college — plus, toting a contrabass then meant a double plane ticket. "Kahil was eternally optimistic," Ben Israel recalls.

Vietnam vet Montgomery returned to Chicago for personal reasons soon after the group arrived in Europe, leaving Wilkerson, Huff and El'Zabar sans crucial rhythm section components. After shacking up in an Italian farmhouse, they eventually bagged a gig in Bologna opposite Joe Henderson. "That was defining," El'Zabar remembers. "We realized we could hold our own, that what we were doing was valid." The trio cut a poised, evocative and burning first disc in Italy called *Impressions* (Red Records), following up with *Three Gentlemen From Chikago* (Moers Music), another outstanding effort.

Henceforth, El'Zabar, undaunted to this day, kept the ball rolling with shifting personnel — including stalwart members Joseph Bowie and Ernest Dawkins — to record for a host of record labels such as Leo, Silkheart, Open Minds, CIMP, Katalyst and Delmark. In 1993, the group hit major leagues with the Capitol/EMI-connected Chameleon label for *Dance With The Ancestors*. "That only happened once, but when we were on that label, we did *Charlie Rose*, all the top clubs in NYC and L.A.," he said. "It was exciting but didn't last."

Thanks to his fortuitous association with Thea Ioannou and Mark Gallagher at Spirit Music, he's experiencing another moment "and it doesn't matter whether this one lasts either, because I'm not going to last," Kahil laughs wryly. "Things happen in cycles. Right now is great. I was named one of 10 significant emerg-

ing artists at the age of 70! As an elder artist, that people are saying what I'm doing is relevant, you want to feel that."

Talking of cycles, Picasso postulated that the first half of life was learning to be an adult, the second half learning to be a child. Is that a sustaining principle to avoid ossifying?

"Absolutely," concurs El'Zabar. "Despite my 50-year legacy, *Open Me* suggests I'm still trying to be a child, inquisitive, in the moment, open to possibilities. When I first played with Corey, Junius (Paul), Justin (Dillard) and Isaiah (Collier), I had to relearn the language of performance to be in communication with a younger peer group. I predate hip-hop and the house generation, but had to be childlike and connect these forms with the early AACM or playing with Dizzy or Pharoah to open again and enjoy what can be simplified into potent, effective statements."

That said, Wilkes and Harding are entirely au fait with jazz history and El'Zabar revels in throwback, notably exhuming Eugene McDaniel's "Compared To What" leaned notoriety by Les McCann's 1969 rendition alongside a formative El'Zabar mentor in Eddie Harris.

El'Zabar's version on *Open Me* is a bulbous kalimba/anklebell stomp; Harding's bari providing bass lines as well as nodding to Harris' tenor sax vocalizations; Wilkes referencing Benny Bailey's inflammable trumpet with emphatic shake and growl; the strings subtle-then-slashing. Archly, the leader half-mumbles the hyper-real-then-phantasmic lyrics with Gil Scott-Heron-esque intimacy and ghosted grunts 'n' groans. Any resemblances disavow differences in the update. His vocals are El'Zabar's ace-in-the-hole, lending him a star power that leaves other percussionists counting sour grapes. He's no Bill Withers but demonstrates how he can split the difference between the partials of upper and lower octaves.

El'Zabar habitually prefixes the term "avant garde" with "so-called" since, though a risk-taker, he's always been a groover. That's stood him well, as he's been known to gyrate in fast R&B circles in the past, working the '70s chitlin' circuit with Donny Hathaway. He can drop other household names — but early on, as the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble testifies, he had the urge, beyond miscellaneous appendage on commercial gigs, to become the beating heart of his own aggregations. Epiphany, passion and instinct are watchwords for El'Zabar, yet he's an acute strategist who knows how to get house.

"The Ethnics are not esoteric with a studied kind of audience connection," he says. "Within our uniquely limited instrumentation, we can get people loud and excited, hold them into a feeling of dance, access entertaining aspects of joy in a performance. We seldom fail in having command of that."

'Within our uniquely limited instrumentation, we can get people loud and excited ...'

It might seem that El'Zabar is his own biggest fan — he knows he's been an instigator — initiating the pioneering Underground Afterfests during the Chicago Jazz Festival (1978–85); chairing the AACM; co-owning Rituals Jazz Club in Chicago; hosting countless loft happenings and conducting experimental performances in numerous alternative locations; consulting with the Oakland East Side Arts Alliance; and biannually guesting as an artist-in-residence in Bordeaux for the past 20 years where he embraces visual art, dance, fashion and his large-scale Infinity Orchestra.

Despite all this, he's had to fight for recognition.

"When I first proposed the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, a couple of labels said, 'This dude is racist, how can jazz be ethnic?' But I've never been a racist person. If you are from Nigeria, Germany, England or China, you have an ethnic heritage. Blues, jazz, funk, rock 'n' roll, whatever you want to call it; Southern American creole food and certain influences in fashion in the last 150 years, a lot of that came directly from the African American experience."

Realizing he still possesses a flair and charisma that sets him apart, El'Zabar encourages fans to get to his shows. "People are amazed at the levels of energy I play with at 70, but if folks want to see me like this, they better come see me now," he says.

His debonair presence is grounded by the consistency of his beats and the distillation of his concepts; he's also effusively generous about his fellow musicians. James Sanders, he avers, "can get in there and scrap like Billy Bang, then brings a masterful sense of structure." He speaks highly of the "tenderness, timbre and originality" of Wilkes, Harding's "rhythmic velocity, jovial spirit, the light he brings to the group" and the "sensitivity, flexibility and tonality" of Ishmael Ali's cello. The latter, at 38, is the baby of the band.

"The thing that struck me with Kahil and the cats," Ali says, "is the energy and intentionality behind everything. It's something that drew me to free playing/improvised music, but I rarely experience in jazz generally. Everything is pointed and high-def with a steady fire behind it, ready to roar or simmer."

Sanders, who took a fierce solo during a recent WGN TV broadcast, finds the Ensemble "intuitive and comfortable. Lots of space and respect for good fundamentals. The African grooves relate to a lot of the Afro Cuban music I play. Many of the clave concepts fit really well."

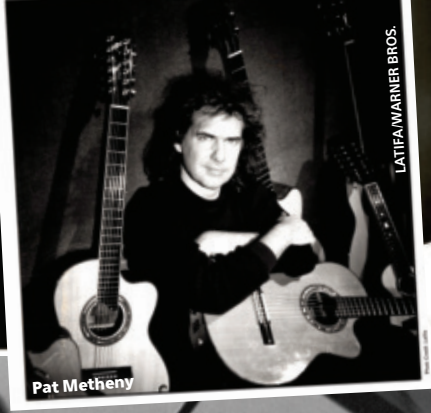
El'Zabar refers to his fellow Ensemble road warriors as "extraordinary human beings," who share "an enormous camaraderie." The feel-good factor allied to acumen may still arouse the suspicion of the cognoscenti, but El'Zabar has prevailed through thick and thin and managed to establish unity amongst seven offspring from several relationships, as he proudly displays in a family photograph on his desk. "He's Got The Hold World In His Hands" served as an encore during that show at The Promontory. It may whiff of the temporal, but it's city-of-big-shoulders savvy from a musician steeped in the lore of Chicago jazz who was hanging with hard-living tenor titan Gene Ammons as a teenager and copping legendary shows weekly at the Regal Theatre (courtesy of his father's second job as a security guard).

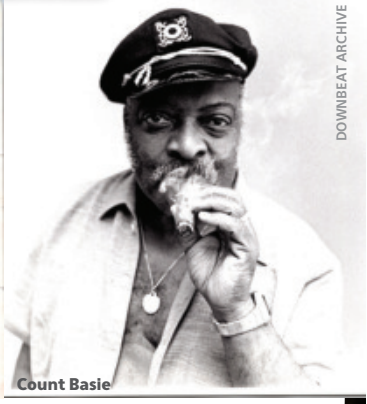
Kahil El'Zabar lived next to Emmet Till's bereaved mom growing up and swept snow from Mahalia Jackson's doorstep — that South Side heritage bestows deep cultural echo and imprint. Against odds, "Hang Tuff" and maintain "The Passion Dance" (two mainstays in the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble's setlist), notwithstanding the pressures of parenting and societal obligato.

"One thing I'm grateful for," says El'Zabar, — whose favorite term of endearment is "Daddy-O," perhaps evoked by "One For Daddy-O" by Cannonball Adderley, who El'Zabar worked for back in 1972 — "I didn't make a bunch of Kahil El'Zabars. My children are all individuals. I didn't dominate them. I know it's real between us."

As for Slivinski, who's shared her life and workspace with him for 17 years, he says, "It's a wonderful improvisation and collaboration of love."

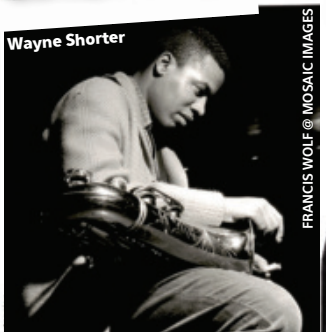
Wilkes has felt the same about his 19-year tenure with the Ensemble. "Since the beginning, it felt like an extended family," he says. "It was also eye-opening to learn and develop a new concept of playing, after being under the assumption there was only one way to approach avant-garde jazz." **DB**

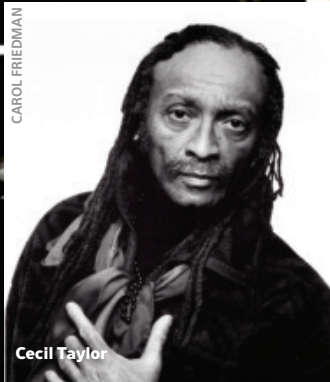




THE 90 GREATEST JAZZ ARTISTS OF ALL TIME!

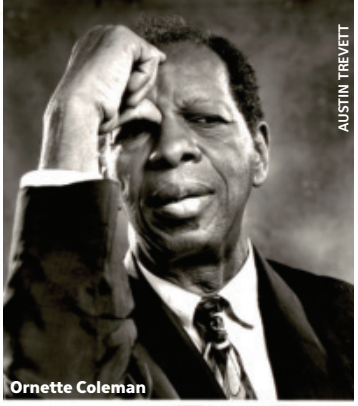
As a preview to our 90th anniversary year in July, the DownBeat crew set out on an nearly impossible mission — to create a list of the 90 Greatest Jazz Artists of All Time. After weeks, more like months, of hand-wringing and choosing between "favorite children," the following pages display our list, in alphabetical order because we couldn't begin to agree on any sort of ranking. Most are members of the DownBeat Hall of Fame. In parentheses after those names there will be a C, R or V and a year. The letters let you know if the critics, readers or veterans committee voted the artist into the Hall, and when. Beyond that, enjoy and let the debate begin!





DOWNBEAT ARCHIVE
Benny Goodman

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVE
Sun Ra


AUSTIN TREVETT
Ornette Coleman

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVE
Miles Davis

GERALD MURRELL/ROCKSCHOOL

DENNIS KEEL/VERVE
Charlie Haden

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVE
Duke Ellington

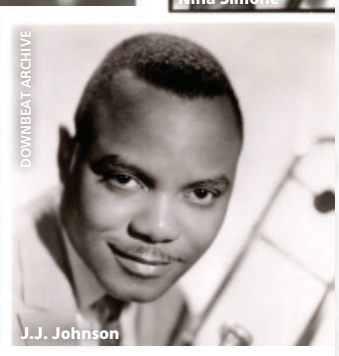
CAROL FRIEDMAN/ELEKTRA
Nina Simone

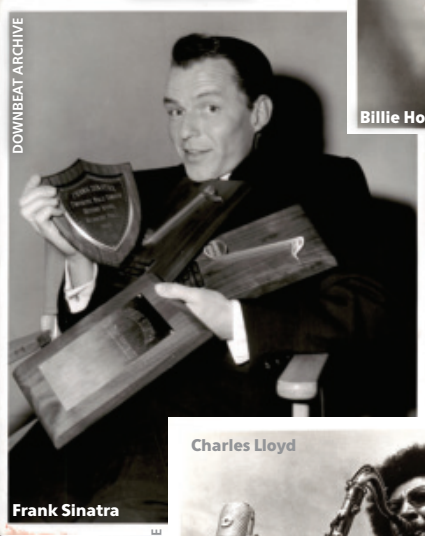
Herbie Hancock

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVE
Art Blakey

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVE
Billie Holiday

VERVE
Ella Fitzgerald

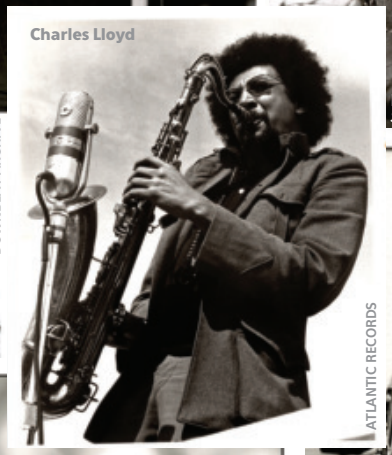

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVE
J.J. Johnson


DOWNBEAT ARCHIVE
Frank Sinatra

PARAMOUNT PICTURES
Nat Cole from the film
St. Louis Blues

ROGER RESSMEYER/WATT/ECM
Carla Bley

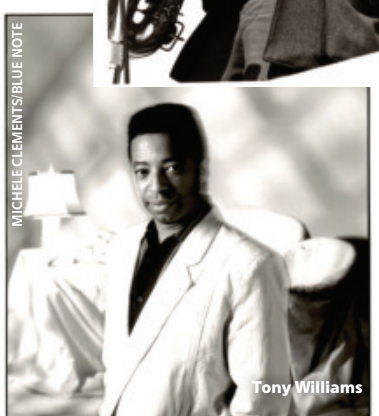
DOWNBEAT ARCHIVE
Mary Lou Williams


Charles Lloyd
ATLANTIC RECORDS

JIM MARSHALL/PRESTIGE
Eric Dolphy

Sonny Rollins
URT GOLDBLATT/PRESTIGE

MILESTONE RECORDS
Ron Carter


MICHELE CLEMENTS/BLUE NOTE
Tony Williams

Cannonball Adderley *(R 1975)*
Beyond his catalog of amazing, groovin' music, Julian "Cannonball" Adderley was also a talent scout. He championed other artists coming to — Blue Mitchell, Wes Montgomery and Nancy Wilson, to name three.
One Great Tune — "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" (*Mercy, Mercy, Mercy! Live At "The Club,"* Capitol, 1967)

Louis Armstrong *(R 1952)*
"Pops is the daddy of them all, and without him, we wouldn't have anything to follow. I hope he's around a long time to watch us follow in the path he laid for us," said trumpeter Clark Terry in honor of Armstrong's 70th birthday in the July 9, 1970, edition of DownBeat.
One Great Tune — "I've Gotta Right To Sing The Blues" (*I've Got The World On A String*, Verve, 1960)

Albert Ayler *(C 1983)*
The tenor saxophonist's wailing tone captured the zeitgeist of the 1960s avant garde, his sound reaching well beyond jazz to stir the imagination of souls seeking art on the road less traveled.
One Great Tune — "The Truth Is Marching In" (*Live In Greenwich Village: The Complete Impulse Recordings*, Impulse!, 1998)

Count Basie *(R 1958)*
He led the most swinging big band in history with grace, modesty and humility. "It always amazed me how he controlled the band with his little plinks on the piano," Wesley told DB in a September 2004 interview. "I felt like I was in the presence of royalty for real."
One Great Tune — "Basie's Bag" (*Count Basie Get Together*, Pablo, 1979)

Sidney Bechet *(C 1968)*
Bechet blazed a path to Chicago, then New York, a route that many followed to fame. He continued on to Paris, where he became a hero. "When the unmistakable sound of his soprano sax cut through the closed curtain, there were bursts of cheering and applause," said DB reviewer Marian McPartland (yes, that Marian McPartland) of Bechet in reviewing a Paris jazz festival for the July 1, 1949, edition of DB.
One Great Tune — "There'll Be Some Changes" (*The Fabulous Sidney Bechet*, Blue Note, 1958)

Art Blakey *(R 1981)*
The famed drummer led perhaps the finest hard-bop finishing school in jazz history with his Jazz Messengers. Its alumni often went on to become even more famous than the leader — take, for example, Wayne Shorter, Freddie Hubbard, Keith Jarrett, Lee Morgan, Chuck Mangione and Wynton and Branford Marsalis.
One Great Tune — "A Night In Tunisia" (*Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers: A Night In Tunisia*, Blue Note, 1961)

Michael Brecker *(R 2007)*
"The man is revered by his peers and idolized by music students who painstakingly pour over transcriptions of his incandescent solos," wrote Bill Milkowski in a June 1987 DB cover article.
One Great Tune — "Itsbynne Reel" (*Don't Try This At Home*, Impulse!, 1988)

Clifford Brown *(C 1972)*
In his autobiography, Dizzy Gillespie included Brown with the likes of Buddy Bolden, King Oliver, Miles Davis and himself in shaping the sound of trumpet in jazz.
One Great Tune — "Jordu" (*Clifford Brown & Max Roach*, EmArcy, 1954)

Ray Brown *(R 2003)*
He was thoughtful, locked-in and always in command of the time. "I think of my bass just like I do my body," Brown said in the Jan. 29, 1976, edition of DB. "I keep it clean, and I take it in for a regular checkup with a fine repairman."
One Great Tune — "That's All" (*Ray Brown & Jimmy Rowles: As Good As It Gets*, Concord, 1977)

Dave Brubeck *(R 1994)*
The groundbreaking pianist never strayed far from his classic quartet format, which helped make him one of the most popular artists in jazz history.
One Great Tune — "Blue Rondo à la Turk" (*Time Out*, Columbia, 1959)

Carla Bley *(C 2021)*
One of the greatest composers in jazz history, Bley broke down walls for women. "I feel like I should be in a cage with a sign on me that says, 'She wrote the music,'" Bley said during an interview for DB's August 1984 issue.
One Great Tune — "Two Banana" (*Carla Bley: The Lost Chords Find Paolo Fresu*, Watt/ECM, 2007)

Benny Carter *(C 1977)*
A multi-instrumentalist known as much for his arrangements as his saxophone and trumpet playing, Carter arranged for the best of the best — Count Basie, Louie Bellson, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Peggy Lee and Carmen McRae head up a short list.
One Great Tune — "A Walkin' Thing" (*Jazz Giant*, Contemporary, 1958)

Betty Carter *(C 1999)*
No vocalist was more distinct than Betty Carter. Confident, determined and original, she filled her bands with future stars including Cyrus Chestnut, Geri Allen, Benny Green, Stephen Scott and Lewis Nash.
One Great Tune — "30 Years" (*The Music Never Stops*, Blue Engine, 2019)

Ron Carter *(R 2012)*
The most-recorded bassist in music history, Mr. Carter is "the epitome of jazz elegance and rectitude: utterly attentive on the bandstand, devoted to the collective music going down," said writer Howard Mandel in a May 1996 DB feature.
One Great Tune — "Lawra" (*Third Plane*, Milestone, 1977)

Charlie Christian *(C 1966)*
He elevated the guitar to equal status with the other instruments of jazz with his forward-leaning melodic and rhythmic concepts. Christian also never forgot essentials like the blues.
One Great Tune — "Rose Room" (*The Genius Of The Electric Guitar*, Sony Legacy, 1987)

Nat "King" Cole *(R 1997)*
A voice like butter, often overshadowing his prodigious skills as a pianist, the "King" broke down walls with grace and elegance. In 1956, he debuted *The Nat "King" Cole Show* on NBC, becoming the first nationally broadcast TV show hosted by an African American.
One Great Tune — "Walkin' My Baby Back Home" (*Nat King Cole's 8 Top Pops*, Capitol, 1952)

Ornette Coleman *(R 1969)*
When *Free Jazz: A Collective Improvisation By The Ornette Coleman Double Quartet* came out in 1961, DownBeat had two reviewers write about it. One gave it 5 stars, the other gave it 0. A stalwart of the avant garde, Coleman unapologetically challenged the norm.
One Great Tune — "Lonely Woman" (*The Shape Of Jazz To Come*, Atlantic, 1959)

John Coltrane *(R 1965)*
He's on the Mount Rushmore of jazz. What more needs to be said about the most stirring, spiritual, seeking saxophonist in jazz history.
One Great Tune — "A Love Supreme, Pt. 1: Acknowledgement" (*A Love Supreme*, Impulse!, 1965)

Chick Corea *(R 2010)*
The ultimate explorer, Chick Corea will be remembered for his wide-ranging interests. Beyond his Elekric and Akoustic bands, Mr. Corea's collaborators included Bobby McFerrin, Gary Burton, Béla Fleck, Herbie Hancock, Hiromi and so many more.
One Great Tune — "Spain" (*Return To Forever: Light As A Feather*, Polydor, 1973)

Miles Davis *(R 1962)*
Another member of the Mount Rushmore of jazz, Miles Davis carved a path no one will ever be able to follow. The one-of-a-kind trumpeter understood something that only the very best figure out: The art of recording and the art of the live show are two very different disciplines. He surrounded himself with the best and demanded something new every day.
One Great Tune — "I Fall In Love Too Easily" (*Seven Steps To Heaven*, Columbia, 1963)

Eric Dolphy *(R 1964)*
"He was as interested in the complex, sonic surfaces of Xenakis, the quaint chaos of Ives, or the serial intricacies of Babbitt as in the soulful expressivity of a Coleman Hawkins, the forceful 'messages' of Charles Mingus, or the experiments of 'the new thing,'" said Gunther Schuler, father of the Third Stream movement, in an Aug. 27, 1964, DB tribute to Dolphy.
One Great Tune — "Fire Waltz" (*At The Five Spot*, New Jazz, 1961)

Roy Eldridge *(C 1971)*
"Eldridge first burst on the scene in the '30s and became the most influential trumpet of his generation," said writer John McDonough in a Dec. 15, 1977, DB interview. Nicknamed "Little Jazz," he advanced trumpet technique pointing the way from the swing era toward bebop.
One Great Tune — "If I Had You" (*Little Jazz*, Clef, 1955)

Duke Ellington *(R 1956)*
"Talk about taking care of business … Duke's the cat," said Count Basie during a Sept. 18, 1958, DB interview where he called Ellington the best bandleader of all time. He's another member of our jazz Mount Rushmore. "Duke Ellington's genius manifested itself in his musicianship, his composition and his leadership," said Wynton Marsalis on the occasion of Duke's 100th anniversary in 1999.
One Great Tune — "Take The 'A' Train" (*Ellington Uptown*, Columbia, 1953)

Bill Evans *(C 1981)*
One of the most searching, romantic pianists in jazz. He played on the Miles classic *Kind Of Blue*, but his solo career and work with George Russell, Chet Baker, Charles Mingus and Tony Bennett place him in the center of jazz history.
One Great Tune — "Peace Piece" (*Everybody Digs Bill Evans*, Riverside, 1959)

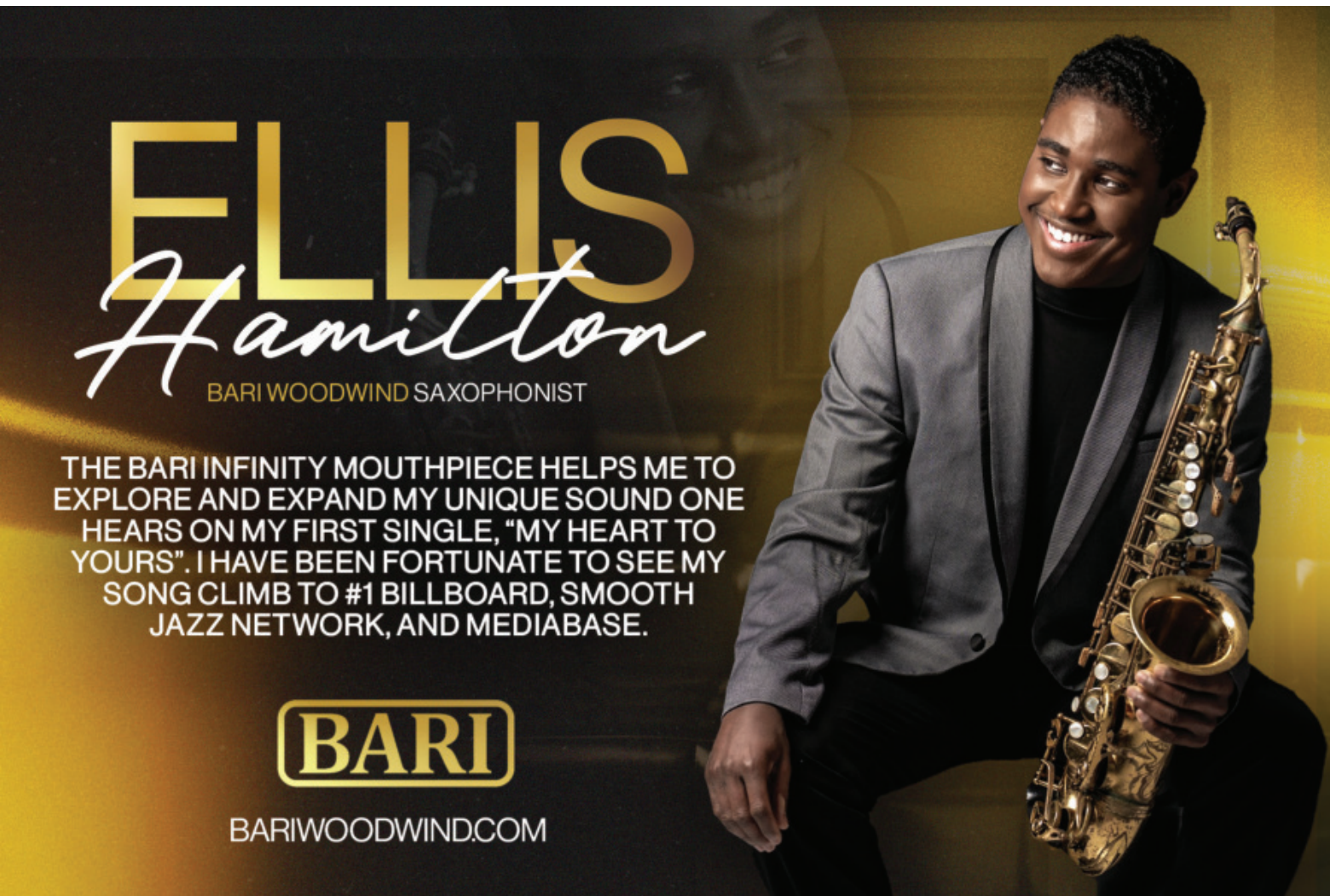
Gil Evans *(C 1986)*
A composer, arranger and bandleader of elegance and grace, Gil Evans is best known for his work with Miles Davis, helping the trumpeter craft some of his most endearing records: *Birth Of The Cool*, *Miles Ahead*, *Porgy And Bess* and *Sketches Of Spain*.
One Great Tune — "Summertime" (*Porgy And Bess*, Columbia, 1959)

Ella Fitzgerald *(R 1979)*
Ella Fitzgerald was the first lady of jazz. As one of the most-beloved voices ever, Ms. Fitzgerald was alway respectful of her band members and arrangers, often downplaying her own vast talents. "They can make you sound better than you really are, yet the arrangers seldom get the credit for it," she told writer Leonard Feather in a Nov. 18, 1965, DB interview.
One Great Tune — "Just One Of Those Things" (*Ella Fitzgerald Sings The Cole Porter Songbook*, Verve, 1956)

Stan Getz *(R 1986)*
"Stan Getz's career may thus be viewed, in no small measure, as that of a pop profit in the jazz world," said writer Arnold J. Smith in the Aug. 12, 1977, edition of DB. His search for sound led him to Brazil, famously teaming with João Gilberto. "I can never think of it as 'bossa nova,'" Getz said in that 1977 interview. "That seems like such a silly name for what is basic, beautiful, introspective music."
One Great Tune — "Desafinado" (*Getz/Gilberto*, Verve, 1964)

Dizzy Gillespie *(R 1960)*
Can our Mount Rushmore of jazz have more than four names? Yes, because John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie has to be on it. The speed, swagger, humor and joy Mr. Gillespie brought to the trumpet and to jazz is unparalleled.
One Great Tune — "Salt Peanuts" (*Groovin' High*, Savoy, 1955)

Benny Golson *(C 2018)*
Perhaps the classiest tenor saxophonist, composer and arranger jazz has ever seen, Mr. Golson has written a slew of jazz standards — "I Remember Clifford," "Whisper Not,"



"Stablemates" and "Killer Joe" to name a few.
One Great Tune — "Killer Joe" (*Meet The Jazztet*, Argo, 1960)

Benny Goodman *(R 1957)*
"The King of Swing" broke the mold. He took an integrated band to the South. When Teddy Wilson and Lionel Hampton joined, it was the first integrated band to appear in front of a paying audience in America. The 1938 Carnegie Hall concert in New York broke down more walls.
One Great Tune — "Sing Sing Sing" (Brunswick, 1936)

Dexter Gordon *(R 1980)*
When Dexter Gordon returned to New York in 1976 after spending a large portion of his career in Europe, it stirred a frenzy, becoming "one of the great musical triumphs of recent times," according to Chuck Berg in a Feb. 10, 1977, DB article.
One Great Tune — "'Round Midnight" (*Homecoming: Dexter Gordon Live At The Village Vanguard*, Columbia, 1977)

Charlie Haden *(C 2013)*
Mr. Haden never settled. He could play moody noir with his Quartet West, songs of rebellion with his Liberation Music Orchestra, free-jazz with Ornette Coleman, spiritual duets with Hank Jones or guest on any pop record. "I say if they want to play music at the level of freedom, of beauty, you have to play as if you're willing to risk your life for every note you're playing," Haden said in an August 1994 DB cover feature.
One Great Tune — "Song For Ché" (*Liberation Music Orchestra*, Impulse!, 1970)

Lionel Hampton *(R 1987)*
One of the most thoughtful, energetic musicians to ever grace the stage, Hampton broke the color barrier with Benny Goodman, then went on to attain a level of stardom few jazz musicians have ever seen.
One Great Tune — "Flying Home (NBC Broadcast, Jan. 14, 1940" (*Lionel Hampton: The Complete Jazz Heritage Society Recordings*, Amerco, 1993)

Herbie Hancock *(R 2005)*
Another alumnus of Miles, Hancock learned his lessons well and took them farther than Miles ever dreamed, refusing to be trapped in any musical idiom. Acoustic, electric, jazz or funk, Hancock has followed his muse.
One Great Tune — "Chameleon" (*Headhunters*, Columbia, 1973)

Coleman Hawkins *(C 1961)*
Sometimes referred to as the father of the tenor saxophone, Hawkins blazed a pioneering trail. He was the star soloist in Fletcher Henderson's big band in the 1920s until a kid named Louis Armstrong showed up. In 1939, he released "Body And Soul," now a staple of the jazz canon.
One Great Tune — "Out Of Nowhere" (*Wrapped* Tight, Impulse!, 1965)

Roy Haynes *(C 2004)*
Originality and listening never go out of fashion. That's the key to Roy Haynes' success as a drummer. He played with Lester Young. He played with Miles, Charlie Parker, Sarah Vaughan, Stan Getz, Chick Corea and so many more. No matter the setting, he played with style.
One Great Tune — "Diverse" (*Birds Of A Feather: A Tribute To Charlie Parker*, Dreyfus, 2001)

Fletcher Henderson *(C 1973)*
"Today's jazz listener is likely to be unaware of the huge debt that current music owes to James Fletcher Henderson," wrote musician Rex Stewart in the June 3, 1965, issue of DB. "Ragtime, swing, bop, and Third Stream all stem from the same tree. Fletcher Henderson was a bridge between the earliest forms and what later evolved."
One Great Tune — "Big John Special" (*Tidal Wave, The Original Decca Recordings*, GRP, 1994)

Andrew Hill *(C 2007)*
Critic James Hale wrote of Hill, "His induction into the [DownBeat] Hall of Fame acknowledges an artist with a distinctive voice, expansive influence and two fertile periods three decades apart," in DB's August 2007 Critics Poll edition.
One Great Tune — "Sideways" (*Passing Ships*, Blue Note, 2003)

Earl "Fatha" Hines *(C 1965)*
He swing like no other pianist, and as a bandleader, Fatha knew best, with artists like Benny Carter, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and Sarah Vaughan performing in his big bands.
One Great Tune — "I Ain't Got Nobody" (*A Monday Date*, Riverside, 1961)

Milt Hinton *(C 2001)*
Known as The Swinging Judge, no one swung harder than Milt Hinton. A master of style and locked-down rhythm, Mr. Hinton got his a big break with Cab Calloway, who he played with for some 14 years.
One Great Tune — "New Orleans" (*Judge At His Best: The Legendary Chiaroscuro Sessions, 1973-1995*, Chiaroscuro, 2002)

Johnny Hodges *(C 1970)*
What would the Duke Ellington Orchestra sound like without the alto saxophone stylings of Johnny Hodges? His vibrato could bring even the most hardened heart to tears.
One Great Tune — "A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing" (*Everybody Knows Johnny Hodges*, Impulse!, 1964)

Billie Holiday *(R 1961)*
Her one-of-a-kind voice captured the soul and pain of the human experience in a way that no other vocalist had before or since.
One Great Tune — "Strange Fruit" (*Lady Sings The Blues*, Clef, 1956)

Freddie Hubbard *(R 2009)*
Trumpeter Dave Douglas called him "the most imitated [trumpeter] of the last half century" in eulogizing Hubbard in DB's April 2009 edition.
One Great Tune — "Red Clay" (*Red Clay*, Columbia, 1970)

Milt Jackson *(R 1999)*
"Milt is both as down-to-earth and bluesy as one of his nickname, 'Bags,' suggests," wrote trumpeter Jon Faddis in a November 1999 DB cover interview he did with Mr. Jackson.

"And he's as dignified and elegant as a Sunday preacher — as his other nickname, "the Reverend," testifies. And he is always about bebop." He was a founding member of the Modern Jazz Quartet and an innovator on the vibraphone.

One Great Tune — "That Old Devil Moon (*On Riverside: Milt Jackson*, UMG, 2023)

Ahmad Jamal *(R 2011)*

Mr. Jamal crossed over in a way few jazz artists ever have. His album *But Not For Me: Live At The Pershing* sold a million copies. Jamal played a sophisticated bop that transformed the jazz trio into a formidable ensemble.

One Great Tune — "Poinciana" (*But Not For Me: Live At The Pershing*, Argo, 1958)

Keith Jarrett *(R 2008)*

Another in the long line of Miles Davis alumni, Mr. Jarrett has been a once-in-a-generation improviser in any setting — especially his stellar solo and trio work.

One Great Tune — "God Bless The Child" (*Standards, Vol. 1*, ECM, 1983)

J.J. Johnson *(R 1995)*

A hero of bebop trombone, Mr. Johnson fought to keep from being pigeonholed into a corner of the music world. His playing was precise, always swinging. He also ventured into the realm of Third Stream and classical, always seeking new ways to express himself.

One Great Tune — "Stolen Moments" (*J.J.!*, RCA, 1965)

Elvin Jones *(C 1998)*

The great drummer drove the John Coltrane Quartet, then went on to thrill audiences with his own bands, including his Jazz Machine, which toured and recorded from the 1980s until his passing in 2004.

One Great Tune — "Necessary Evil" (*Brother John*, Quicksilver, 1982)

Thad Jones *(C 1987)*

Elvin's brother Thad sparkled as a trumpeter, but as a composer and bandleader, he exploded. Early, he was a featured soloist in the Count Basie Orchestra and contributed mightily as an arranger and composer. He formed the famed Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra and later moved to Europe and turned the Danish Radio Big Band into a swing juggernaut.

One Great Tune — "A Child Is Born" (*Consummation*, Blue Note, 1970)

Gene Krupa *(R 1972)*

He drove the dancers wild from the drum set of Benny Goodman's band, and his solo on "Sing Sing Sing" changed the course of history for drummers of all genres.

One Great Tune — "Drum Boogie" (*Gene Krupa*, Blue Pie, 1955)

John Lewis *(C 2002)*

Founder and musical director of the Modern Jazz Quartet, the composer and pianist auditioned for Dizzy Gillespie's band with one of his original songs, one that later became "Two Base Hit," now a jazz standard. He was an essential cog in Miles Davis' nonet for the classic *Birth Of The Cool*. With the MJQ, he helped provide a sea change for jazz incorporating improv and classical elements that made the music high art.

One Great Tune — "Django" (*MJQ & Friends—A 40th Anniversary Celebration*, Warner, 1993)

Charles Lloyd

The tenor saxophonist and multi-instrumentalist has calmly carved one of the most impressive careers in jazz history. His 1966 hit recording *Forest Flower* sold more than a million records and had Lloyd crossing over to the rock world. What's amazing has been his continued growth as an artist, producing high-quality music and capturing awards into the 2020s.

One Great Tune — "The Water Is Wide" (*The Water Is Wide*, ECM, 2000)

Wynton Marsalis *(R 2017)*

Mr. Marsalis shaped trumpet and composition for generations. His work with Jazz At Lincoln Center has been extraordinary, marshaling big-money donors to build a New York showplace beyond the wildest dreams of those who came before. As a composer, *Blood On The Fields*, a treatise on the history of slavery, made him the first jazz musician ever to win a Pulitzer Prize.

One Great Tune — "Sloganize, Patronize, Realize, Revolutionize (Black Lives Matter)" (*The Democracy Suite*, Blue Engine, 2021)

Christian McBride

With virtuosity, humor and intelligence, Christian McBride has become the complete package of a modern jazz musician.

One Great Tune — "Blues Connotation" (*The Q Sessions*, Mack Avenue 2022)

John McLaughlin

The great British guitarist is yet another Miles Davis alumnus whose far-reaching artistry blurs the line between musical formats. His Mahavishnu Orchestra played with stunning precision and soul. The group Shakti allowed McLaughlin a deep dive into Indian classical music.

One Great Tune — "Shrini's Dream" (*Shakti, This Moment*, Abstract Logix, 2023)

Pat Metheny *(R 2013)*

"When I think of all my favorite musicians, the thing that they all seem to have in common — in fact, maybe the only identifiable characteristic that they share — is that they are all true individuals," Mr. Metheny wrote in a February 1998 DB cover feature. Those words apply to the master guitarist himself, a restless soul whose

musical contexts continually change.
One Great Tune — "It Starts When We Disappear" (*Side-Eye NYC (V1.IV)*, BMG, 2021)

Charles Mingus *(R 1971)*
A larger-than-life presence on bass whether leading his groups or composing, Mr. Mingus wowed with intelligence, social protest and beauty.
One Great Tune — "Haitian Fight Song" (*The Clown*, Atlantic, 1957)

Thelonious Monk *(R 1963)*
The iconoclastic pianist and composer played and wrote as uniquely as any artist ever in jazz. He was a presence that the jazz world could not get enough of on and off the bandstand.
One Great Tune — "Crepuscule With Nellie" (*Monk's Music*, Riverside, 1957)

Wes Montgomery *(R 1968)*
The great guitarist crossed over with his smooth, unique style on guitar and ability to turn pop tunes into jazz-driven gold.
One Great Tune — "Twisted Blues" (*So Much Guitar!*, Riverside, 1961)

Jason Moran
Moran makes the list for his insatiable curiosity and grand vision. His hip-hop infused tributes to Fats Waller, complete with a giant paper mache mask of Waller he wears on stage, drive new generations to the music. His multimedia extravaganzas inspire, employing film, dance, art and words.
One Great Tune — "Blue Blocks" (*Ten*, Blue Note, 2010)

Lee Morgan *(R 1991)*
"Morgan was a player of almost unparalleled individuality, burning hard-swinging, soulful trumpet solos in the late 1950s and '60s on his own records and with artists like Art John Coltrane, Hank Mobley and Wayne Shorter," wrote David French in DB's January 2000 edition.
One Great Tune — "The Sidewinder" (*The Sidewinder*, Blue Note, 1964)

Jelly Roll Morton *(C 1963)*
He claimed that he created jazz in 1902 on the pages of DownBeat's September 1938 issue, and he just might be right. Mr. Morton was an early, essential innovator of the art form.
One Great Tune — "Black Bottom Stomp" (*Birth Of The Hot: The Classic Chicago "Red Hot Peppers" Sessions*, RCA/Bluebird, 1995)

Gerry Mulligan *(R 1993)*
Perhaps the greatest baritone saxophonist of all time, Mulligan's career marks the history of jazz with Claude Thornhill, Miles Davis, Chet Baker and Stan Kenton. His work as a composer produced several classics.
One Great Tune — "Walkin' Shoes" (*The Best Of The Gerry Mulligan Quartet With Chet Baker*, Blue Note, 1991)

Joe "King" Oliver *(C 1976)*
The mentor of Louis Armstrong, Mr. Oliver composed a variety of early jazz hits and pioneered using a trumpet mute.
One Great Tune — "Dippermouth Blues" (*Louis Armstrong And King Oliver*, Milestone, 1974)

Charlie Parker *(R 1955)*
Jazz Mount Rushmore, meet Mr. Charlie Parker. His virtuosity on saxophone helped usher in the bebop era.
One Great Tune — "Parker's Mood" (*The Savoy 10-Inch LP Collection*, Craft, 2020)

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Oscar Peterson *(R 1984)*
Known for his fleet, soulful pianism, Mr. Peterson wowed audiences around the globe as one of the music's greatest pianists.
One Great Tune — "Sushi" (*A Time For Love: The Oscar Peterson Quartet Live In Helsinki, 1987*, Mack Avenue, 2021)

Bud Powell *(R 1966)*
"He was the foundation out of which stemmed the whole edifice of modern jazz piano; every jazz pianist since Bud either came through him or is deliberately attempting to get away from playing like him," said Herbie Hancock for the Sept. 22, 1966, edition of DB.
One Great Tune — "Like Someone I Love" (*Blues For Bouffémont*, Fontana, 1964)

Sun Ra *(C 1984)*
Claiming "Space is the place," Sun Ra became an unequalled avant-garde entertainment original.
One Great Tune — "Space Is The Place" (*Space Is The Place*, Impulse!, 1973)

Django Reinhardt *(C 1971)*
The godfather of gypsy jazz and one of the most creative guitarists to ever improvise.
One Great Tune — "Nuages" (*The Great Artistry Of Django Reinhardt*, Clef, 1954)

Buddy Rich *(R 1974)*
Bold, bombastic and blazing, Buddy Rich attacked the drums and music in a way no drummer had before — or since.
One Great Tune — "Willowcrest" (*The Lost Tapes, Scabeba/Lobitos Creek Ranch*, 2017)

Max Roach *(C 1980)*
Max Roach explored the drums and music with a fire to bring equality to his people. Take, for example, *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Suite Now.*
One Great Tune — "Freedom Day" (*We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Suite Now*, Candid, 1960)

Sonny Rollins *(R 1973)*
The Saxophone Colossus, one of the most inventive minds to ever play jazz. His compositions are standards. His live shows demonstrated an endless river of improvisatory glory.
One Great Tune — "The Bridge" (*The Bridge*, Sony, 1962)

Artie Shaw *(C 1996)*
Perhaps the finest musician to ever play the clarinet, Shaw was a swing-era star with few, if any, rivals.
One Great Tune — "Begin The Beguine" (*The Essential Artie Shaw*, Columbia, 2005)

Woody Shaw *(R 1989)*
"Now there's a great trumpet player," said Miles Davis in a January 1983 DB feature on

Mr. Shaw. "He can play different from all of them."
One Great Tune — "Blackstone Legacy" (*Blackstone Legacy*, Contemporary, 1971

Wayne Shorter *(C 2003)*
One of this music's bravest explorers. Yet another Miles alumnus, Shorter went on to become one of this music's greatest composers.
One Great Tune — "Footprints" (*Adam's Apple*, Blue Note, 1966)

Horace Silver *(R 1996)*
He wrote songs of swinging elegance full honest, folksy beauty just like the man himself. "Song For My Father," "The Preacher" and "Doodlin'" scratch the surface.
One Great Tune — "Song For My Father" (*Song For My Father*, Blue Note, 1965.

Nina Simone *(C 2019)*
With rich contralto vocals that oozed triumph over tears and jaw-dropping piano virtuosity, Ms. Simone drew audiences into her world.
One Great Tune — "Mood Indigo" (*Little Girl Blue*, Bethlehem, 1959)

Frank Sinatra *(R 1998)*
Mr. Sinatra made a name with the swing bands and became one of the biggest stars in entertainment. He did it with style and swagger, drawing generations of fans to his music.
One Great Tune — "Fly Me To The Moon" (*Sinatra At The Sands*, Reprise, 1966)

Bessie Smith *(C 1967)*
The growling vocals of The Empress of the Blues fit perfectly with her sassy presence. She made more than 150 records for Columbia in the 1920s and '30s.
One Great Tune — "Gimme A Pigfoot And A Bottle Of Beer" (*The Final Chapter: The Complete Recordings Vol. 5*, Columbia, 1996)

Jimmy Smith *(R 2006)*
No one swung the Hammond B-3 as hard as Jimmy Smith, an instrument he helped popularize in jazz.
One Great Tune — "The Sermon" (*The Sermon*, Blue Note, 1959)

Billy Strayhorn *(R 1967)*
It's difficult to discuss Duke Ellington without thinking of Billy Strayhorn, who wrote "Take The 'A' Train," "A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing" and "Lush Life," to name three classics.
One Great Tune — "Lush Life" (*John Coltrane And Johnny Hartman*, Impulse!, 1963)

Art Tatum *(C 1964)*
With some of the fleetest fingers ever to touch a piano, the stylings of Art Tatum could turn the simplest of tunes into a mind-blowing affair.
One Great Tune — "Night And Day" (*The Tatum Group Masterpieces, Volume Eight*, Fantasy, 1956)

Cecil Taylor *(C 1975)*
Cecil Taylor forged his own road-less-traveled in avant garde circles. Pianist, poet and performance artist, he challenged the norms.
One Great Tune — "Elell" (*Garden First Set, Hat Hut, 2015*)

McCoy Tyner *(R 2004)*
The pianism of McCoy Tyner shimmers with organic, volcanic energy that made magic in the classic John Coltrane Quartet.
One Great Tune — "Walk Spirit, Talk Spirit" (*Quartet*, Half Note, 2007)

Sarah Vaughan *(R 1985)*
"Hers is a perfect instrument, attached to a musician of superb instincts, capable of expressing profound human experience, with a wholly original voice," Gunther Schuller was quoted as saying of Sarah Vaughan in the May 1982 edition of DB.
One Great Tune — "Lullaby Of Birdland" (*Sarah Vaughan*, Verve, 1954)

Fats Waller *(C 1968)*
Artist and entertainer Fats Waller played piano and sang with larger-than-life exuberance.
One Great Tune — "The Joint Is Jumpin'" (*A Handful Of Keys*, Buddha, 1999)

Chick Webb *(V 2010)*
Perhaps best known for his orchestra's 1935 hit "A Tisket, A Tasket," sung by a young Ella Fitzgerald, Webb was a big band leader and drummer of the first order.
One Great Tune — "Sugar Foot Stomp" (*The King Of The Drums: Chick Webb And His Savoy Ballroom Orchestra*, Ancha, 1968)

Mary Lou Williams *(C 1990)*
No one can deny the talents of Mary Lou Williams at the piano. In 1990, she was the first female instrumentalist inducted into the DownBeat Hall of Fame.
One Great Tune — "What's Your Story Morning Glory" (*My Mama Pinned A Rose On Me*, Pablo, 1977)

Tony Williams *(C 1997)*
A child prodigy who joined Miles Davis' second great quartet at the age of 17, Mr. Williams, according to Davis, was the center of the group's sound. After Miles, he became a pioneer of the fusion movement with his group Lifetime.
One Great Tune — "Fred" (*Believe It*, Sony, 1975)

Lester Young *(R 1959)*
An alumnus of the Basie Band, Prez had a sound recognizable from the first note. He accompanied Billie Holiday. He recorded with Nat "King" Cole.
One Great Tune — "Lester Leaps In" (*In Washington D.C. 1956, Vol. 2*, Fantasy, 1980) **DB**

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Charles Lloyd debuts a new quartet on *The Sky Will Still Be There Tomorrow*.

Charles Lloyd
The Sky Will Still Be There Tomorrow

BLUE NOTE

★★★★½

About two-thirds into "Monk's Dance," Charles Lloyd's quizzical lines on tenor saxophone begin building more momentum, especially as drummer Brian Blade and bassist Larry Grenadier push the tempo. Lloyd's melodic improvisational lines coil like spinning tops across the rhythm section's ebullient propulsion and Jason Moran's equally whimsical piano accompaniment. If you close your eyes while the song progresses, you can easily image Thelonious Monk engaging in one of his famous spiraling dances as his band whips out a rambunctious groove.

Lloyd switches to alto flute to tip his hat to Booker Little on the hypnotic "Booker's Garden," where his languid passages snake around Moran's jagged piano countermelody, Blade's abstract rhythmic drive and Grenadier's haunting bass ostinato, which discreetly dissolves and reforms as the collective dialogue intensifies. Then, there's his soul-stirring homage to Billie Holiday with the phantasmagorical "The Ghost Of Lady Day," on which Lloyd's deliberate tenor saxophone melody evokes the solemn majesty Holiday infused in "Strange Fruit."

Those three compositions alone afford Lloyd's momentous double-album *The Sky Will Be There Tomorrow* with a seal of greatness; the album also introduces a splendid new quartet. Both Moran and Grenadier have recorded with Lloyd on previous albums, but this marks the first time Blade has been documented with Lloyd in a studio setting. And just as the leader has established profound rapports with the bassist and pianist, his accord with Blade is just as keen.

Lloyd has produced some his best work since signing with the Blue Note label a decade ago. The glorious *The Sky Will Be There Tomorrow* exemplifies his pursuit of late-career brilliance. —*John Murph*

The Sky Will Be There Tomorrow: Defiant: Tender Warrior; The Lonely One; Monk's Dance; The Water Is Rising; Late Bloom; Booker's Garden; Ghost Of Lady Day; The Skill Will Be There Tomorrow; Beyond Darkness; Sky Valley; Spirit Of The Forest; Balm In Gilead; Lift Every Voice And Sing; When The Sun Comes Up, Darkness Is Gone; Cape To Cairo; Defiant Reprise: Homeward Dove. (90:46)

Personnel: Charles Lloyd, tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, alto flute, bass flute; Jason Moran, piano; Larry Grenadier, bass; Brian Blade, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: bluenote.com

Vijay Iyer Trio
Compassion
ECM
★★★★½

In 2021, when pianist Vijay Iyer released *Uneasy,* his first album with drummer Tyshawn Sorey and bassist Linda May Han Oh, the trio's bond was immediate and enduring. Now returning with *Compassion*, Iyer's trio is just as musically magnificent. The album's 12 tracks are a perfect blend of luscious melody, thumping rhythms and complexity.

Opener "Compassion" sets the tone, gently lulling the listener as Sorey works brushes over Iyer's languorous phrases, before picking up in pace and finding Sorey rumbling on the floor tom as Iyer frees up his left hand. As the album continues, this intensity simmers. The dextrous "Arch," in honor of the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, sees Oh in the spotlight, plucking muscular lines on her double bass, while "Maelstrom," dedicated to victims of the pandemic, spotlights Iyer's flair for sprightly, polyrhythmic phrasing, battling against the groove as much as flowing with it.

These original works are angular and full of soulful swing, yet it is in the trio's reinterpretations that they soar. Iyer masterfully transposes Roscoe Mitchell's cacophony of horns on "Nonaah" into the ferocious speed of his two hands, while Stevie Wonder's "Overjoyed" explodes into a majestic, deeply swung, seven-minute odyssey kept afloat by Sorey's melodic work on the toms.

Compassion expresses its titular emotion through the deep feeling these three musicians have for each other. Their confident improvisation breaks new ground while always maintaining a tenderness for the joy of music itself.

—Ammar Kalia

Compassion: Compassion; Arch; Overjoyed; Maelstrom; Prelude: Orison; Tempest; Panegyric; Nonaah; Where I Am; Ghostrumental; It Goes; Free Spirits/Drummer's Song. (65:29)
Personnel: Vijay Iyer, piano; Linda May Han Oh, bass; Tyshawn Sorey, drums.
Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Francisco Mela & Zoh Amba
Causa y Efecto, Vol. 2
577
★★★

Untethered two-party improvisation has become increasingly rare, making this free-wheeling outing by drummer Francisco Mela and reed player Zoh Amba compelling for its relative novelty. Even so, it's not without its shortcomings.

The 24-year-old Amba grew up enthralled by the likes of Albert Ayler and David S. Ware, unabashed by an open-ended approach that has all but vanished. In Mela, whose early work included stints with Joe Lovano and McCoy Tyner, Amba has a partner with the scope and technique to mix it up in any format — free or otherwise.

Of course, the bar for this approach is high: Coltrane/Ali, Parker/Lytton, Braxton/Roach high. Mela and Amba appear unfazed, diving into the take-no-prisoners squall of "Causa y Efecto," which pairs the top end of Amba's tenor with Mela's tom-forward drumming. It's a bold programming move, and a setup for the sonic switcheroo that hurls the listener into the relative calm of "Mundos Diver," which combines much lighter percussion with Amba's flute in playful call and response.

The flute returns for the opening section of "MEZO," a discursive, 16-minute dialogue that moves smoothly from introspection to fury and back. "Experiencias" and "El Cisne Bla" stand apart for their heavier reliance on Mela's rhythms, and both illustrate the supportive nature of the pairing while providing a sturdy, compelling framework for the saxophonist's aggressive solos.

Not everything works — even at just 45 minutes, this album could use some editing — but it seethes with promise. *—James Hale*

Causa y Efecto, Vol. 2: Causa y Efecto; Mundos Diver; Experiencias; MEZO; El Cisne Bla. (45:51)
Personnel: Zoh Amba, flute, tenor saxophone; Francisco Mela, drums, vocals.
Ordering info: 577records.bandcamp.com

Gregory Tardy
In His Timing
WJ3
★★★½

Gregory Tardy has been a steady mainstream voice for more than 30 years, principally on tenor but with occasional digressions to clarinet — which he plays on this handsome recording with violinist Regina Carter, pianist Taber Gable, bassist Matthew Parrish and drummer Alvester Garnett. There is a chamberish, drawing-room quality to his music that keeps the temperature and passion at a moderate flame. The program is in no great hurry and offers him space to spin willowy and lissome arpeggios that flatter the repertoire with a genteel and airy elegance.

Tardy's gentility contrasts with Carter's somewhat bolder heft on six of the 10 tracks, although in a couple of close encounters they go at one another with a mutually muscular equilibrium. Their back-and-forth climaxing on "Will The Circle Be Unbroken" puts them eyeball to eyeball and brings out the fight in each. As they toss fours and eights on Johnny Hodges' delightful "Squatty Roo," their point-counterpoint ricochets with the kind of quick sleight-of-hand and savvy surprise normally reserved for the home stretch of a jam session.

Their other duets are more collaborations than conversations. "Tree Of Life" is a lovely piece with supportive give-and-take. "Cloud Dance" is a serene ensemble spotlighting bassist Parrish. The leader's own "Crazy Love," "The Last Shall Be the First" and "Never Been In Love Before" are solo Tardy at his most courtly. Jazz with a proud sense of its propriety.

—John McDonough

In His Timing: Will The Circle Be Unbroken; I've Never Been In Love Before; The Roman Road; In His Timing; Squatty Roo; The Tree Of Life; Cloud Dance; The Sign Of Jonah; The Last Shall Be The First; Crazy Love. (51:04)
Personnel: Gregory Tardy, clarinet; Regina Carter (1, 3–7), violin; Taber Gable, piano; Matthew Parrish, bass; Alvester Garnett, drums.
Ordering info: wj3records.com

The Hot Box

Critics	John Murph	Ammar Kalia	John McDonough	James Hale
Charles Lloyd *The Sky Will Still Be There Tomorrow*	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★
Vijay Iyer Trio *Compassion*	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★
Gregory Tardy *In His Timing*	★★★★	★★★½	★★★½	★★★½
Francisco Mela & Zoh Amba *Causa y Efecto, Vol. 2*	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★

Critics' Comments

Charles Lloyd, *The Sky Will Still Be There Tomorrow*

85-year-old Lloyd has been experiencing a late-career renaissance in recent years. On *The Sky Will Still Be There Tomorrow,* the quartet with Jason Moran, Brian Blade and Larry Grenadie locks in seamlessly, artfully framing Lloyd's whisper-soft tone. *—Ammar Kalia*

A labored and morose reverie that craves animation. Lloyd's feathery sound crawls in pondering strides and shadowy tremolos. Even crowded little clusters of energy sound sedated. "Monk's Dance" and the title tune provide welcome charm and playfulness. *—John McDonough*

A late-career gem. Lloyd and Jason Moran have long exhibited a superb connection, and combustible rhythm mates Larry Grenadier and Brian Blade are also ideal companions for this wide-ranging exploration of beauty. *—James Hale*

Vijay Iyer Trio, *Compassion*

This exquisite album quietly ups the ante on 21st-century modern jazz piano trio excursions. *—John Murph*

Iyer offers balance, taste and a tidy sense of order to these new and less familiar pieces, giving them an approachable deportment. Even an AACM hornet's nest like Roscoe Mitchell's "No-naah" is shaped to fit this superior trio's ensemble cohesion and rigor. *—John McDonough*

Is there anything as musically satisfying as a well-balanced, improvising trio? Busy, yet relaxed, and interlocking beautifully, Iyer's band offers a tremendously active recording that contains more than any listener could absorb in a single play. *—James Hale*

Gregory Tardy, *In His Timing*

With a focus on the leader's acumen on clarinet, the album radiates gleeful yet graceful aplomb. *—John Murph*

An emotive collection of compositions that pay homage to formative bandmates like Tom Harrell, as well as to his late mother. Tardy's tone is soft and soulful, perfect for the tender lament of "Crazy Love," although somewhat more whimsical on the violin pairings. *—Ammar Kalia*

Taut playing on some exuberantly melodic material. Tardy's return to clarinet and his choice of violinist Carter give this a somewhat retro feel: part Stéphane Grappelli, part Sidney Bechet. *—James Hale*

Francisco Mela & Zoh Amba, *Causa y Efecto, Vol. 2*

The emotional immediacy of these drum and tenor saxophone and/or flute free-jazz excursions far outweigh their memorability. *—John Murph*

A powerhouse of freeform improvisation. Tracks like "Causa y Efecto" act as a rallying cry for energetic action, while Mela's vocalisations on "Mundos Diversos" and "El Cisne Blanco" weave seamlessly between the cracks of a groove that often feels on the verge of breaking apart. *—Ammar Kalia*

A leap of faith into the avant-abyss of "spirituality," where the gods give great license but grant no guarantees of grace. Drums and horn converse, but find little sustainable narrative. After 60 years, freedom has become a formula without a Rosetta Stone. *—John McDonough*

TPR

"...this bandleader is an artist on the rise"
– DownBeat Magazine

Following his JUNO Award-nominated album *Joy*, drummer Ernesto Cervini leads his dynamic sextet *Turboprop* into new territory, celebrating the rich tapestry of Canadian music. This album blends Cervini's striking originals with imaginative arrangements of beloved pop/rock anthems and compositions by Canadian luminaries. *A Canadian Songbook* is a vibrant, heartfelt, and introspective journey through the nation's musical landscape, as envisioned by one of its most passionate advocates.

An evocative, transformative musical journey for expanded jazz orchestra and 4 voices, Sarah Jerrom's *Magpie* is a tour de force, an emotional odyssey, a narrative of resilience, transformation, and the magic of storytelling through music.

Guided by the folkloric nursery rhyme *One for Sorrow*, this 90-minute suite takes listeners on a journey through the eyes of its main character, Woman/Magpie, delving into deep themes of feminism, infertility, grief, hope, and love.

TPRrecords.ca

divr
Is This Water
WE JAZZ
★★★★½

Playing music involving looping always has a hypnotic quality, so rote that to say that you've heard something like this before is almost hilariously on the nose. To loop and do something so distinctly different with the format, like surfing over a whirlpool, is a marvel to behold. It's absurd how good Swiss trio divr is at playing this music.

"Upeksha" seems to wash over the ear, hiding the sucker punch of the trio's construction. It's a common trope for many of these songs: Even when playing what could be considered a more conventional composition, like "Supreme Sweetness," Philipp Eden plays with an ear both to the future of the genre and to the past. Bassist Raphael Walser seems to always find the right times to keep that hypnotism going and when to break the trance for a different sort of spell.

"Tea High" is a steady build of brilliance, climbing forever to sweet release, seemingly collapsing at the summit it reaches at the end. The cover of Radiohead's "All I Need" is the perfect deconstruction of the tune's melody and time, seemingly leaving Eden to lay out its phrases hither and yon, Jonas Ruther's boiling over on the drum kit by tune's end feeling almost like what Dave King would do on an early The Bad Plus album.

For an album of tunes that largely finds its pleasures in tacking along in one direction while finding different ways to go in the other, *Is This Water* is one of the most delightful sideways turns 2024 has to offer.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Is This Water: As Of Now; Upeksha; Supreme Sweetness; 42; VHS Tomorrow; Tea High; All I Need; Echo's Answer; A Glass Is No Glass Is A Glass. (40:45).
Personnel: Philipp Eden, piano; Raphael Walser, bass; Jonas Ruther, drums.

Ordering info: mixeduprecords.com

Jun Iida
Evergreen
ORIGIN ARTS
★★★½

Trumpeter Jun Iida, who makes his recording debut on *Evergreen*, grew up in St. Louis and Pittsburgh, spent time in Los Angeles, and during the past three years has lived in Seattle. Before relocating to New York, he recorded *Evergreen* to pay tribute to his period on the West Coast.

Iida has a mellow tone and a relaxed style. While his playing is somewhat laid back and unexciting, this is a solid start and his future development should be worth watching. His wide interests in music and versatility are on display during a release that features an excellent sextet with keyboardist Josh Nelson, guitarist Masami Kuroki, bassist Jonathan Richards, drummer Xavier Lecouturier and, as a bonus, singer Aubrey Johnson on a few numbers. Nelson often takes solo honors, guitarist Kuroki has a passionate style and Johnson is outstanding whenever she appears. The vocalist, who has a beautiful tone, mostly sings wordlessly in ensembles and hits some dazzling high notes but she also performs in Japanese on two numbers.

Iida contributes six of the 10 selections, including the infectious "Gooey Butter Cake," the warm ballad "Song For Luke" and a thoughtful "My Anguish In Solidarity" inspired by George Floyd. Two numbers, the children's melody "Akatombo" and a jazz version of the J-Pop song "Shiki No Uta," have Iida paying tribute to two aspects of his Japanese heritage. Also included is a warm and melodic duet with Nelson on "Love Theme From Spartacus" and the boppish Sonny Rollins-Elmo Hope song "Bellarosa."

—Scott Yanow

Evergreen: Gooey Butter Cake; Akatombo; Evergreen; Shiki No Uta; Bellarosa; Forgotten Memories; Love Theme From Spartacus; My Anguish In Solidarity; Song For Luke; Holding On To Autumn. (58:51)
Personnel: Jun Iida, trumpet; Aubrey Johnson, vocals; Masami Kuroki, guitar; Josh Nelson, piano, electric piano; Jonathan Richards, bass; Xavier Lecouturier, drums.

Ordering info: originarts.com

Chris Rottmayer
Being
SHIFTING PARADIGM
★★★½

A prolific composer and diligent scholar of the jazz canon, Chris Rottmayer explores modal jazz and polytonal motifs on *Being*, his fourth album. This record pays homage to the legacy of pianist Mulgrew Miller and his time with the Woody Shaw Quintet.

Miller and Shaw's influence is palpable throughout the record, in big and small ways. Many of Rottmayer's compositions are in direct conversation with the modal concepts, polytonal motifs and harmonic planing techniques that characterized Miller and Shaw's works. "On The Street Where Woody Lives" leans on the chord progression of Shaw's "Green St. Caper." Here, Rottmayer's lines are joyous and unrelenting, reminiscent of Miller's dynamic melodies and vigorous playing. "Song Of Modes" pays homage to Shaw's "Song Of Songs" with modal motifs and wide intervals played by trumpeter Russ Johnson. "Ballerina Dance" is a foil to Shaw's "Katerina Ballerina," featuring an ethereal piano melody and an understated yet muscular rhythm played by bassist Rufus Reid.

Sprinkled throughout are meditations on Shaw's life in Paris, where he lived for more than 20 years. "Rue des Lombards" is an ode to Paris' jazz clubs, featuring a frenetic melody by Johnson and Rottmayer and an effervescent drum solo that evokes a lively cabaret vibe.

Being is a lovingly meticulous study in modal jazz. Rottmayer and his quartet masterfully capture Miller's lyrical flair and Shaw's remarkable tonality while also bringing a distinct perspective and fluidity to the record.

—Ivana Ng

Being: On The Street Where Woody Lives; Re-United; Pigalle; Châtelet; Autumn Evening; Song Of Modes; Ballerina Dance; La Seizième; Pont Neuf; Rue des Lombards. (76:16)
Personnel: Chris Rottmayer, piano; Russ Johnson, trumpet, flugelhorn; Rufus Reid, bass; Matt Endres, drums.

Ordering info: shiftingparadigmrecords.com

Jim Snidero
For All We Know
SAVANT
★★★★½

For alto saxophonist Jim Snidero, cutting an album with just bass and drums isn't a case of "less is more" so much as "less takes more." That is, instead of using it as an opportunity to break free from the shackles of regular changes, Snidero seems to take the lack of chordal instruments as a challenge, constructing his solos so ingeniously that even without chords the harmony is always clear.

There's nothing nostalgic about the way Snidero treats these standards. Take, for example, the album-opening title track; even the head finds him dropping only occasional references to J. Fred Coots' original melody. What we get instead is a clear idea of the chord changes and the possibilities hidden within them. With bassist Peter Washington leaving the basic pulse to drummer Joe Farnsworth, the bass line offers counterpoint to Snidero's playful extrapolations, as Washington's substitutions spur the saxophonist on to ever giddier heights. Still, even the final chorus — performed a cappella — maintains discipline; no matter how far Snidero pushes a line, it's still easy to hear the harmony beneath the form.

Washington and Farnsworth have played and recorded with Snidero for years now, so it's no surprise that the three are so simpatico. But it's Washington who is the album's secret sauce, delivering brilliant intros for "Naima" and "You Go To My Head," and laying down such a funky bottom that "Parker's Mood" sizzles despite the fact that Snidero doesn't play a single blues lick until the last chorus.

—J.D. Considine

For All We Know: For All We Know; Naima; Love For Sale; Blackberry Winter; Parker's Mood; Willow Weep For Me; My Funny Valentine; You Go To My Head. (53:27)
Personnel: Jim Snidero, alto saxophone; Peter Washington, bass; Joe Farnsworth, drums.
Ordering info: jazzdepot.com

Andrew Richards
The August Session
INDEPENDENT RELEASE
★★★★

The August Session was cut live, in one five-hour gathering, at Big Orange Sheep Studio in Brooklyn. It's an intimate recording, balancing Richards' tenor vocals with the discreet piano work of Moshe Elmakias. Stacy Dillard joins in on five numbers, adding his saxophone to the mix to compliment Elmakias' fluid melodic improvisations.

Richards pens melodies that draw on the best aspects of jazz, folk and pop music. "Andalusian Love" opens the record, with Elmakias playing subtle, Baroque-like fills while Richards sings softly, describing the "son of the Moor and the girl of the Jew" dancing in the Spanish moonlight. Richards slips into his lower register to whisper the lyrics on "Ocean In Between." Elmakias plays the melody on the bass keys, as Richards expresses the heartache he feels for a bygone love.

Dillard and Elmakias lay down a laid-back samba rhythm for "My Little Suede Shoes," a Charlie Parker tune with new lyrics by Richards. He invites a partner to join him in a dance across New York's landscape, slipping into a Louis Armstrong growl for two verses. "Eleanor Rigby" and "You Can't Always Get

What You Want" are arranged as ballads, with Richards adding subtle scats to the end of the lines of the Stones' tune. "Arthur McBride," a traditional Irish antiwar song, is sung simply, with Elmakias providing right hand trills here and there. The set closes with "There's Only Now," a poignant co-write with Elmakias, that reminds us that every minute of this life is precious.

—j. poet

The August Session: Andalusian Love; You Can't Always Get What You Want; The Riddle; My Little Suede Shoes; Ocean In Between; Why Can't I Fall In Love; Blue Black Ribbon; Divine; Eleanor Rigby; Arthur McBride; Old Country; There's Only Now. (52:56)
Personnel: Andrew Richards, vocals; Moshe Elmakias, piano; Stacy Dillard, tenor and soprano saxophone.
Ordering info: andrewrichardsmusic.com

Reverso
Shooting Star–Étoile Filante
ALTERNATE SIDE
★★★½

Reverso puts forth a refreshingly unique and sonically effective trio instrumentation of piano, trombone and cello (Frank Woeste, Ryan Keberle and Vincent Courtois, respectively), the latter of which can swing in both percussive and legato directions. Echoes of a chamber jazz sensibility are clearly present, partly due to the inherent textural weave of this instrumental blend. Some of the material would hew closer to a standard jazz setting, were it presented in a standard piano trio format.

In the case of this Reverso album, as with previous projects, the classical music connection is virtually umbilical. The stated objective here is to pay tribute to French composer deserving-greater-recognition Lili Boulanger (1893–1918). In keeping with her particular impressionistic touch as a composer, it is mostly a lyrical and accessible musical that principal composer Woeste lays out for the group, but with variation and improvisatory detours along the way. After the soothing sweetness of the opening "La Muse," for instance, they turn towards the thornier terrain of the cleverly named "Obstination" — driven by a terrace repeating riff we might call an *obstinato*.

Airs of melancholic tenderness work into the album's middle passage, a nod toward Boulanger's own dark-ish expressive side, as heard on Keberle's "Nocturne" and Woeste's "Requiem." Turning another stylistic corner, the trio lends an easy, loping swagger to "Lili's Blues," which segues the finale of Courtois' "Dernier Moteur," translating to "Last Engine" and infused with a gently motoric rhythm and a bittersweet ambience. In Reverso, "chamber jazz" has a notable power trio, in evolutionary motion.

—Josef Woodard

Shooting Star–Étoile Filante: La Muse; Obstination; Resilience; Nocturne; Ma Jolie; En Avant; Requiem; Shine; Lili's Blues; Dernier Moteur. (47:26)
Personnel: Frank Woeste, piano; Ryan Keberle, trombone, voice; Vincent Courtois, cello.
Ordering info: alternatesiderecords.weebly.com

JEAN-PIERRE LELOIR

Les McCann, 1967

2 Pianists: Theme and Variation

Les McCann (1935–2023), the hit-making, foot-stomping, down-home swinger, and **Mal Waldron** (1925–2002), the dark-toned, sonic seducer, are but two examples of how diverse the jazz piano continuum was in the 1960s and '70s.

Born in Kentucky, McCann's jet-propelled pianism was fueled by gospel and navigated by the blues on a soul-jazz flight plan already charted by Ramsey Lewis. McCann operated from Los Angeles, and recorded a number of mostly trio LPs before he released his mega-hit live album *Swiss Movement* with the Chicago saxophonist Eddie Harris in 1969, which yielded the Eugene McDaniels-penned smash single "Compared To What," complete with McCann's raw and righteous vocals echoing the urbane outrage of Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" and foreshadowing Marvin Gaye's game-changing classic *What's Going On?*

The 21 previously unreleased radio broadcasts on the compelling, three-CD compendium ***Never A Dull Moment: Live From Coast To Coast 1966–1967*** **(Resonance; 136:53 ★★★★)** are a swinging precursor to *Swiss Movement*, and they captured the larger-than-life pianist in his earthy, improvisational element. Save for "(Back Home Again In) Indiana," a bonus track recorded in 1963, the rest of the Seattle tracks were recorded at that city's Penthouse club on Jan. 27, Feb. 3 and Feb. 10, 1966, with bassist Stanley Gilbert and drummer Tony Bazley. Jazz standards like Dizzy Gillespie's "Blue 'N Boogie" and "A Night In Tunisia" (with a glancing reference to "Biloxi") are driven by McCann's boppish block chords and Bud Powell-like single-note lines. McCann was an early supporter of the Jamaican pianist Monty Alexander, and he blazes through Alexander's uptempo "The Grabber" with Oscar Peterson-esque ease. McCann's own compositions include the bluesy ballad "Could Be" and his signature dance tune, "The Shampoo."

Recorded one year later and 3,000 miles away (at The Village Vanguard in New York on July 16, 1967) with bassist Leroy Vinnegar and drummer Frank Severino, McCann plays more American standards including Cole Porter's "Love For Sale" and "I Am in Love," his own compositions" (including the head-bobbing "I Can Dig It"), the medium-tempo "Blues 5" and his cool covers of the pop tunes "Sunny," with its Coltrane-ish intro and outro, and the Latin-tinged "Goin' Out Of My Head." With *Swiss Movement* released two years later, and his fusion foray *Invitation To Openness* released in 1972, this collection — which received McCann's blessings before his death last December — is an excellent extension of his swinging legacy.

Ordering info: resonancerecords.org

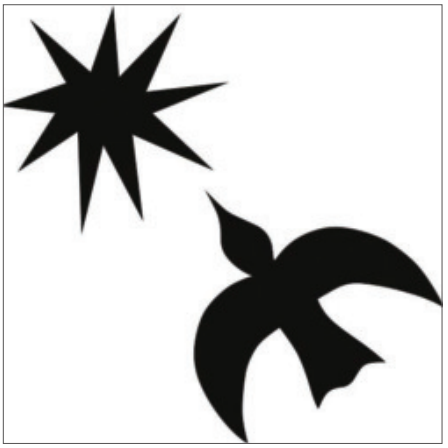
The life and music of Malcolm Earl "Mal" Waldron was different from McCann's. Born in New York City to parents of West Indian heritage, Waldron, a devotee of Thelonious Monk, was a sideman for Charles Mingus, John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy and Billie Holiday in the '50s. Two of his early ballad compositions, "Soul Eyes" and "Left Alone," became minor jazz standards. In 1963, Waldron suffered a drug overdose that rendered him without the ability to play music. He eventually regained his chops and left the United States in 1965 to live in Europe, where he received more recognition for his artistry.

This 1973 recording, ***The Reminiscent Suite*** **(BBE Music; 42:21 ★★★)**, available for the first time outside of Japan, finds Waldron with Japanese trumpeter Terumasa Hino and his quintet featuring his brother Motohiko Hino on bass, saxophonist Takeo Uematsu and trumpeter Isao Suzuki. The entire recording features two extended compositions: Clocking in at 23:41, the Waldron-penned title track comprises three sections: "Dig It Deep Down Baby," "Echoes" and "Once More With Feeling." The composition moves through a series of dark avant-garde stylings, improvisationally ebbing and flowing like an active musical volcano. Hino's turbulent trumpet tones are the perfect foil to Waldron's hypnotizing harmonies and spare improvisations, which are actually designed to push and inspire the other members of the ensemble.

The other long-form work, "The Black Forest," composed by the trumpeter, clocks in at 18:38 and is more of an Afro-Eurasian eclipse of jazz and indigenous Japanese woodwinds, horns and percussion, displaying a hybrid of McCoy Tyner's works from the early '70s and Toshiko Akiyoshi's big band East-meets-West arrangements. Again, it is Waldron's whirling dervish of oblique ostinatos, misterioso melodic fragments and use of space that illuminate the composition — which is also lyrically laced by Hino's bravura Freddie Hubtones.

Ordering info: bbemusic.com

Two pianists, two approaches, from one complex and unfinished art form. **DB**



Alan Braufman
Infinite Love Infinite Tears
VALLEY OF SEARCH

★★★★

Four years have passed since alto saxophonist and flutist Alan Braufman released his sonically charged comeback album, *The Fire Still Burns*. Before that, more than 45 years had lapsed since his debut album, *Valley Of Search*; after its reissue in 2018, Braufman made a serious resurgence. His new release, *Infinite Love Infinite Tears,* highlights him commanding attention once again through slick improvisation and harmonically pleasing phrases.

Opener "Chasing The Melody" is a psychedelic, fast-paced journey with Patricia Brennan hammering on vibes while drummer Chad Taylor builds up to a hard crescendo. Braufman comes in midway with ebullient blowing on the horn. "Brooklyn" is more cheerful in nature, with hints of Afro-Caribbean music. Like his free-jazz predecessors Coltrane, Cherry and Coleman, Braufman finds spirituality in every note.

The album's closer, "Liberation," finds tenor saxophonist James Brandon Lewis in a religious state of improvisatory glory. The rhythm section does the bulk of the heavy lifting as the horns swing below the surface, rarely coming up for air. Coltrane's spirit must have hovered over the room, blessing this tune.

All six songs on *Infinite Love Infinite Tears* are brilliantly conceived. Braufman's style of composing is unique in itself. Rarely does he compose at the piano or consult his horn when writing; he sings tunes to himself, and whatever sticks after a few days ends up in his songbook. When the compositions are executed with his bandmates, the results are utter beauty in the form of intense fragments of joy and thunder.

—Veronica Johnson

Infinite Love Infinite Tears: Chasing A Melody; Infinite Love Infinite Tears; Spirits; Edge Of Time; Brooklyn; Liberation. (41:63)
Personnel: Alan Braufman, tenor saxophone, flute; Patricia Brennan, vibes; James Brandon Lewis, tenor saxophone; Chad Taylor, drums; Ken Filiano, bass; Michael Wimberly percussion.
Ordering info: alanbraufman.bandcamp.com

Lawrence Fields
To The Surface
RHYTHM 'N' FLOW

★★★★

Pianist, composer and St. Louis native Lawrence Fields honed an ageless, lyrical quality while playing in ensembles led by Chief Xian aTunde Adjuah, Terri Lyne Carrington, Branford Marsalis, Dave Douglas and Joe Lovano, among others. On his debut album, he leads a sinewy trio that consists of Fields on piano, Yasushi Nakamura on bass and Corey Fonville on drums. Fields is clearly digging this fresh collective, so much so that the hip standout track "Yasorey" is named for his bandmates.

Fields' introductory solo in "Moving On" brings to mind a harpist's arpeggios, a tranquil prelude before the song explodes into a spirited bop. Overall, his playing on *To The Surface* reveals many such surprises; but some of the most revelatory moments of the recording happen when he locks in with the effervescent heartbeat of Fonville on tracks such as "Parachute" and the infinitely hummable title track. According to the artist, the song "To The Surface" represents "bringing to the surface of ideas, sounds and compositions that have been building up for years."

Bearing in mind that creative buildup, it perhaps shouldn't be surprising that for his debut, Fields made the somewhat orthodox choice to only include one standard: Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn's "I Fall In Love Too Easily." The balance of tunes are self-penned and, reading the tea leaves left behind, suggest an expectant future for the rising star.

—Ayana Contreras

To The Surface: Parachute; New Blues; Moving On; L.B.F.; To The Surface; Yasorey; Vision; I Fall In Love Too Easily; Sketches; The Lookout. (58:53)
Personnel: Lawrence Fields, piano; Yasushi Nakamura, bass; Corey Fonville, drums.
Ordering info: rhythmnflowrecords.com

Ernesto Cervini's Turboprop
A Canadian Songbook
TPR

★★★½

The engaging clarity of Ernesto Cervini's arrangements of works by Canadian pop/rockers The Barenaked Ladies and Our Lady Peace, Juno Award-winning saxophonist Allison Au and ukulele player James Hill — as well as trombonist William Carn and drummer Cervini himself — confers an elegant little-big-band sound to the sextet Turboprop's fourth album.

The two-saxes-and-trombone front line have all the power necessary to dominate but mostly hold it in check, modulated so that Dan Loomis' bass is a highlight while the horns offer subtle backgrounds on both the 'bone-and-tenor-burry "When I Fall" and the easy swingin', closely harmonized "Stuck Inside." Similarly, on "If, Then," Adrean Farrugia's piano offsets Tara Davidson's upper-register line at first by itself, continuing after discreet horn punctuations to unfold a flowing solo over Cervini's propulsion, which eventually claims the spotlight.

"Clumsy" makes use of the ensemble's controlled polyphony; Davidson's yearning alto, when it comes on, twirls most gracefully over the subdued rhythm section; soloist and piano-bass-drums becoming more pronounced as the piece proceeds. Dynamic development is also key to Carn's "Inertia." On "Skeletons" the horns add flesh to a deliberately bare-bones theme that opens into dreamy tutti rubato, followed by horn breaks unencumbered of restraints or particular conventions.

There's no nationalistic sonic stamp flagging this as a Canadian songbook, unless modesty, confidence and accomplishment should be considered natural aspects of the northern country. Regardless of its home, Turboprop's got jazz.

—Howard Mandel

A Canadian Songbook: Skeletons; When I Fall; If, Then; Stuck Inside; Clumsy; Aureole; The Inertia Of Complacency. (43:46)
Personnel: Ernesto Cervini, drums; Tara Davidson, alto saxophone; Joel Frahm, tenor saxophone; William Carn, trombone; Adrean Farrugia, piano; Dan Loomis, bass.
Ordering info: tprrecords.ca

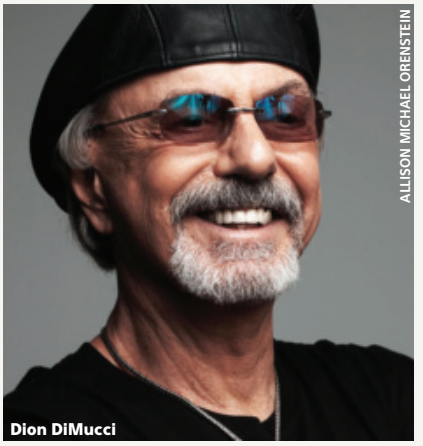
Assorted Colors and Flavors

Dion diMucci has lately been getting into collaborative duo albums, with the new ***Girl Friends*** **(KTBA; 52:25 ★★★½)** being a successor to the mostly male *Blues With Friends* (2020) and *Stomping Ground* (2021). Despite this duos state, Dion (84 years old) remains the governing, dominant personality, his band palette and production balance being similar from track to track.

Most of these self-penned songs lie around four minutes, with Dion carving this timing down to a fine art. The starry roster sparkles with Susan Tedeschi, Shemekia Copeland, Sue Foley, Rory Block and Joanne Shaw Taylor. Blues is prime, but there's a smattering of country, with Carlene Carter joining for "An American Hero," a sentimental ballad that might be calling for an under-70 candidate. Fiddler Randi Fishenfeld also impresses on another countrified song. Throughout, there are smudges of soul, gospel and rock 'n' roll, with organ, strings and horns sometimes added. Tedeschi just plays guitar, but most of the numbers involve verse-line vocal exchanges, with some blues clichés given a humorous or ironic twist, amid the cautious virility. Words are chosen carefully for playful friction. Copeland wins out with the greatest sassy rapport. Foley's spot involves blues, country and gentle zydeco, with an easygoing groove, then Taylor signs off with some tough blues-rockin'.

Ordering info: ktbarecords.com

The Lounge Lizards brought fame to alto saxophonist **John Lurie** in 1982, but in later years he's moved in soundtrack circles, working with Jim Jarmusch and composing for his own television serials. Beset by serious health problems, Lurie has surprised himself by releasing ***Painting With John*** **(Royal Potato Family; 108:56 ★★★★½)**, a mammoth set that adds fresh recordings from the eponymous series to a retrospective mass of imaginative vignettes from earlier days. Lurie says, "This may be the last thing I do. I want it to be beautiful." Ranging from what sound like solo cuts with guitar, banjo, harmonica and close-up catspaw-rough voice to the classic Lizards number "The First And Royal Queen" (used in each episode's end credits), the palette here is mesmerising, including marimba, horns and percussion from old buddies like Steven Bernstein, Michael Blake and Calvin Weston. Most of the 56 pieces only make it to one or two minutes, weaving the effect of a majestic sonic collage, with Lurie's guitar steeped in West African tonality, wry humor lurking throughout. There are also tunes taken from the *Marvin Pontiac*, *African Swim* and *Fishing With John* (his first series) albums. It's effectively the perfect career summation, post-Lizards, when Lurie became centred around soundtrack composition. Beautiful!


ALLISON MICHAEL ORENSTEIN

Dion DiMucci

Ordering info: royalpotatofamily.com

It's only a short amble from the banjo to the lute. Dutchman **Jozef van Wissem**, another Jarmusch collaborator, is also highly active as a solo performer, where his lute takes on an acoustic quality, softly augmented by string and percussion backdrops. Despite its Christian references, ***The Night Dwells In The Day*** **(Incunabulum; 36:42 ★★½)** sounds like it's calling from the pagan folk realms. Wissem sings on some tracks, Hilary Woods guesting on "The Call Of The Deathbird." Most of the pieces are instrumental, with soft electronic footfall: unobtrusive string shadings and a faint bass figure or two. There are virtually no instances of solo flashiness, but rather a dedication to linear development, shaping a cumulative atmosphere of thoughtfulness.

Ordering info: jozefvanwissem.bandcamp.com

Avalanche Kaito is a Brussels trio bringing together Burkinese singer and multi-instrumentalist Kaito Winse, Belgian guitarist Nico Gitto and French drummer/producer Benjamin Chaval. Their second album is ***Talitakum*** **(Glitterbeat; 42:11 ★★★★)**, refining this confrontation between exposed folk vocals and searing electro-punk. Winse plays capering wooden flute, plus talking drum, sometimes acoustically naked and at others sliced up and sampled into loops. Some tracks expose his native West African style, others tip all elements into a molten pot. Its inspired production often warps the drums and guitar electronically, with dancing in the frontal lobes. **DB**

Ordering info: avalanchekaito.bandcamp.com

Ron Horton
A Prayer For Andrew
NEWVELLE
★★★★

Trumpeter Ron Horton celebrates mentor and friend Andrew Hill with the kind of imagination that made the late pianist's work so delightfully provocative. Consonant yet expressive, spectral yet sturdy, the Hill gems and Horton originals constituting this heartfelt homage seem like members of a family. When the gifted trumpeter's "Home" follows up the late pianist's "Venture Inward" on this beautifully recorded session, the latter track's up-front sentiment wisely balances its predecessor's spiky bop demeanor.

There should be nothing shocking about the leader's wisdom when it comes to blending historic jewels and modern artistry. Horton's track record as part of the Herbie Nichols Project, as well as his string of discs as a boss (do check 2006's *Everything In A Dream*), set the stage for this thoughtful spin on Hill's oeuvre. Betting on sympatico, he makes a gaggle of players acquit themselves like a crack working band. The program's 13 pieces boast a snug interplay that brings an enviable warmth to the table.

A Prayer For Andrew is far from a blowing session; arrangements, melodies and mood plant deeper flags. But saxophonists Marty Ehrlich (how about that "ML" opening?) and John O'Gallagher (the fleet salvos of "Scrum") fuel their attacks with lyricism, and the pianist Frank Kimbrough had a strong grip on Hill's sideways stride, as his "Tough Love" romp reveals. Always an apostle of clarity, Horton sets the pace by delivering a handful of exceptional solos that veer left to amplify the honoree's progressive aesthetic: surely a key aspect of this touching valentine. *—Jim Macnie*

A Prayer For Andrew: A Prayer For Andrew; Erato; Venture Inward; Home; Dusk; Scrum; Andrew-ology; ML; Hill Country; 15-8; Tough Love; Punch; Belleza #1. (73:15)
Personnel: Ron Horton, trumpet, flugelhorn; Marty Ehrlich, alto saxophone, bass clarinet (1, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13); John O'Gallagher, alto saxophone (2–4, 6, 7, 9, 12); Marc Mommaas, tenor saxophone; Frank Kimbrough, piano; Dean Johnson, bass; Tim Horner, drums.

Ordering info: newvelle-records.com

Matthieu Bordenave
The Blue Land
ECM
★★★

Arve Henriksen & Harman Fraanje
Touch Of Time
ECM
★★★

These two inter-European projects both characterize and extend the aesthetic impact ECM Records has maintained across the continent for more than five decades, where atmospheric introspection has usually trumped rhythmic forcefulness. Two 1961 sessions by American saxophonist Jimmy Giuffre with pianist Paul Bley and bassist Steve Swallow, later reissued by ECM, have long been touchstones for label founder Manfred Eicher, and, indeed, French saxophonist Matthieu Bordenave mirrored that trio's instrumentation on his 2020 label debut (even if his own take was more drifty). Those same musicians — Swiss bassist Patrice Moret and German pianist Florian Weber — are joined on the saxophonist's follow-up album by British drummer James Maddren, a close collaborator of pianist Kit Downes. The addition of a percussionist doesn't alter the sound too much. Maddren does possess a winning sense of groove, but it's only deployed here and there on *The Blue Land*.

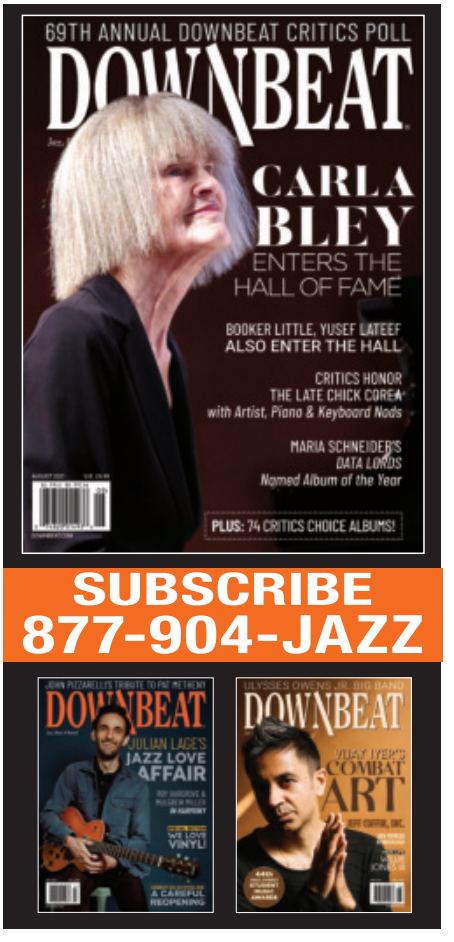
On the title track, a delicately clanging tone poem, with Moret's needling arco and Weber's sustained left-hand stutters, Maddren produces finely detailed metallic pings and muted tom rumbles. In fact, the hardest-hit sounds are prepared hammer thumps from the pianist, with the leader skittering lightly across the evocative soundscape. Bordenave soon arrives at one of his clearest inspirations, tackling John Coltrane's "Compassion" with an attack that slows down time, the leader's languid improvisations parsing Trane's phrases on a granular level. He evokes the sound of Jan Garbarek, another ECM icon, when he picks up the soprano for the weightless meditation "Cyrus." Maddren opens "Distance" with an extended solo which essentially threads the whole piece, the most abstract performance on the album, generating a dash of intensity largely absent elsewhere. But within the quartet's hazy evocations is an impressive interplay that dissects post-bop in slow motion.

Norwegian trumpeter Arve Henriksen and Dutch pianist Harmen Fraanje first met at a 50th anniversary celebration for ECM in Utrecht in 2019, and the spark they initially felt onstage led to this set of rhapsodic ruminations, *Touch Of Time*. They carve out a beautifully specific space: hushed, patient and slow. Motion isn't really marked by rhythm as much as the arcs and swells inside the narrative improvisations. Fraanje wrote three of the album's 10 pieces; the melancholic tone of his "Redream" opens up a fecund path for Henriksen, whose endlessly malleable, breathy tone sands away the instrument's brassy edge. Towards the end of the piece the trumpeter adds some wildcard electronics, bringing a third, edgier voice into the equation, which injects a different strain of tension while enhancing the duo's ardor for the way overtones and effects can extend and reshape sounds produced in their wake.

The spontaneous excursions don't sound markedly different from the composed ones. They're both exceptionally melodic in their sensibilities, but sometimes the dominant vibe errs on the side of fragility and prettiness. There's part of me that desires more heat from both of these albums, but there's no denying the refined communication and heightened listening at play, essential qualities of the ECM worldview. —*Peter Margasak*

The Blue Land: La Porte Entrouverte; The Blue Land; Compassion; Cyrus; Refraction; Distance; Three Four; Timbre; Three Peaks. (44:08)
Personnel: Matthieu Bordenave, tenor and soprano saxophones; Florian Weber, piano; Patrice Moret, double bass; James Maddren, drums.

Touch Of Time: Melancholia; The Beauty Of Sundays; Redream; The Dark Light; Mirror Images; Touch Of Time; Winter Haze; Red And Black; Passing On The Past. (38:16)
Personnel: Arve Henriksen, trumpet, electronics; Harmen Fraanje, piano.
Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Adam Rudolph/ Tyshawn Sorey
Archaisms I

DEFKAZ/META/YEROS7 FK018

★★★★

Adam Rudolph and Tyshawn Sorey have been performing as a duo since 2018. They have occasionally brought in a third party, too: in September 2021, 10 weeks before the performance documented on this LP, they appeared at the Jazz Gallery joined by saxophonist Dave Liebman. That show was released as *New Now* on Rudolph's own Meta label, the music featuring piano and live electronic processing in addition to reeds and percussion. But this performance, from the Zürcher Gallery on Dec. 16, 2021, features only Rudolph and Sorey and is an entirely acoustic affair.

The recording is divided into two sections because of the storage limitations of vinyl, but when heard digitally it's clearly a seamless 45-minute performance. The first half is very much in the lineage of classic Afrocentric/spiritual jazz, with plenty of hand drumming and a few small toots of a bicycle horn, perhaps to honor the Art Ensemble of Chicago. If you were told it was a lost 1971 recording from Brooklyn's The East, you could believe it.

In the second half, things get even more ritualistic, with flute and shakers and small gong strikes. But then, at the 26- or 27-minute mark, Sorey begins to take a for-real drum solo full of sharp snare rolls, and with Rudolph chasing him on wood blocks it starts to sound like a late-at-night-in-the-jungle passage from a mid-'70s Miles Davis concert. In its final minutes, their interaction becomes explosive, almost martial.

This would have been something to witness. —*Phil Freeman*

Archaisms I: Archaism A; Archaism B. (45:32)
Personnel: Adam Rudolph, hand drum set (kongos, djembe, tarija), thumb piano, slit drum, temple blocks, overtone flute, shakers, percussion; Tyshawn Sorey, drum set, percussion.
Ordering info: defkaz.com

Sunny Five
Candid

INTAKT

★★★★

Of this you can be sure: alto saxophonist Tim Berne is not easing up. This session, which was recorded at Firehouse 12 one month shy of his 68th birthday, amplifies some of the most challenging aspects of Berne's music. It takes the dense, electronically saturated sound of the ensembles Snakeoil and Son Of Goldfinger, but peels back the reverberant sheen of their production. And it leans into his longstanding propensity for loquacity.

To accomplish the task of presenting Berne at his heaviest, he has assembled a small cast of familiar faces. Everyone save Devin Hoff has worked with him for decades. The name of this combo is undoubtedly sardonic, given the storminess of its music. The guitarists' contrasting relationships to their effects setups prove complementary; they go together like thunder and lightning. When the rhythm section locks into a brutish stomp, windows will rattle.

But this music is also mercurial. The lengthy playing times of the tracks allows them to contain drastic changes of volume and style.

"Scratch," which at 19:02 is the album's second-longest track, begins with the leader's horn emoting before a backdrop of bubbling electronics and coarse textures, which gives way when the leader steps back to a stormy, thrashing maelstrom of rock-ish chords and unstable rhythms. Berne returns to lead a laborious trudge out of the chaos, which flattens out into a baleful plateau of small sonic gestures.

Next time you need a soundtrack for a tour of an active volcano, put this in your headphones. —*Bill Meyer*

Candid: Piper; Scratch; Craw; Floored. (71:57)
Personnel: Tim Berne, alto saxophone; Marc Ducret, Vendramini guitar, table guitar; Devin Hoff, electric bass; Ches Smith, drums, electronics; David Torn, electric guitar, live multi-looping.
Ordering info: timberneintakt.bandcamp.com

Tony and Jessica Jones
Hearing Into The Future

REVA

★★★½

Hearing Into The Future finds Jessica and Tony Jones looking a lot into the past, and nowhere is the hearing and looking more bountiful than Tony's turns on "Loose Talk" and Jessica's romp on "Bird's Word." Tony evokes Sonny Rollins or the musical dialogue between Eric Dolphy and Charles Mingus. Yes, the talk is loose, but it's also laced with dollops of profundity and Tony knows his way around his horn like an old neighborhood. Jessica teases us with just one track on her horn, but there are plentiful Bird riffs, and you wonder how Eddie Jefferson would handle her lyrical phrases with his vocalese.

Tony emits a similar agility and nimbleness on "Oliver's Leftovers"; whoever Oliver is, he should cherish what the Joneses have dished out. They are an awesome twosome and there must be a recording with them both on saxophones — or should be.

Most tracks consist of exchanges between them, with Jessica's fingers dropping luscious licks on the keyboard and Tony laying out odes on his tenor; they blend wonderfully on "I Thought About You." Theirs is both a literal and

a figurative take on "Duet Ballad," and once more the songful tonality of Tony's tenor is tantalizing as it weaves in and around Jessica's colorfully rendered chords and modulations.

Throughout the album, there's a lovable sense of familiarity (40 years of it), a comfortable intimacy as they anticipate each other and step together into the futuristic mode without losing touch with where they have been.

—*Herb Boyd*

Hearing Into The Future: Oliver's Leftovers; Duet Ballad; Loose Talk Part 2; Waynopolis (via Horaceville); Manhattan; Bird's Word; I Thought About You. (32:05)
Personnel: Tony Jones, tenor saxophone; Jessica Jones, tenor saxophone and piano.
Ordering info: revainc.org

Bill Anschell
Improbable Solutions
ORIGIN

★★★★

There's an irony to how the music on Bill Anschell's *Improbable Solutions* comes together. The album demonstrates patience and careful rumination more than instant gratification. Moreover, knowing that these nine pieces were selected from more than 20 emphasizes how *Improbable Solutions* is about taking one's time, and it's in that spirit that the record is best enjoyed.

"Ambulator" makes this point well. The core piano trio builds around an intriguing piano motif at the start: a mischievous hook with a raised sixth, ending on a minor third. Here and throughout the song, the melody drips with distortion and overlapping layers most audible on the decays of notes at the ends of phrases. "Nimbus" ups the electronic ante as the keys deliver an outright crystalline timbre: an interesting choice given the track's title. Amusingly, it's the pattering on the kit that gives the music its breeze-like qualities: light, consistent and conitnuous as a cloud moving across the sky. "Is This Thing Even On?" nods to the prog-rock lovers. Its angular qualities, thick tones and quick tempo prompt thoughts of a high-stakes car chase, teasing what's to come.

"Abandoned" provides a respite with more organic-leaning tonality in its melody, before KJ Sawka's drumming propels the band forward with captivating agility and Anschell unleashes the final "Outburst" of his musical vision with a flourish of synth sounds and a surge of rock-powered adrenaline.

—Kira Grunenberg

Improbable Solutions: Ambulator; Nimbus; Gentle Persuasion; Naked Truth; Is This Thing Even On?; Hidden Nobility; The Following Week; Abandoned; Outburst (feat. KJ Sawka). (50:43)
Personnel: Bill Anschell, piano, electronics; Chris Symer, acoustic bass, electric bass (5, 9); Jose Martinez, drums; Brian Monroney, guitar (1, 3, 4, 6, 9); Jeff Busch, percussion (2, 4, 8); KJ Sawka, drums (9).

Ordering info: billanschell.com

Lynne Arriale
Being Human
CHALLENGE

★★★★

Pianist and composer Lynne Arriale's latest album is an offering of original compositions with her trio featuring Israeli bassist Alon Near and Polish drummer Lukasz Zyta. The composer offers a suite of 10 pieces dedicated to climate activist Greta Thunberg, poet Amanda Gorman, Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai and other inspiring figures that show what it means to be human.

Two versions of "Love" reveal Arriale's melodic sensibilities. The first is played by the trio; it's a tender, childlike ballad, almost a processional. The second is played solo by Arriale on her Yamaha Clavinova, a digital piano that can sound like an a cappella choir. It is also tender, but in addition, it's nearly a textbook example of voice leading, with small intervals and slow chordal movement. It is both beautiful and mysterious.

"Faith" is soulful and spiritual. "Soul" has Arriale engaging in a call and response with herself. There are occasional right-hand reminders of Jarrett and Corea, but it's all Arriale. Near plays an earthy, nimble solo on "Joy," and Zyta brings the heat on an energetic "Passion" and the bright, catchy calypso "Joy," which sounds vaguely South African.

Arriale has been described as a poet on the piano, and while most of the suite is tonal, there are moments on "Curiosity" where the trio seems the most free, untethered by structure and form.

"I wrote this suite in response to the division and turmoil in our world," says Arriale. I wish world leaders would take the time to listen.

—Larry Appelbaum

Being Human: Passion; Courage; Love; Faith; Curiosity; Soul; Persistence; Heart; Gratitude; Joy; Love (Reprise). (40:26)
Personnel: Lynne Ariale, piano; Yamaho Clavinova (11); Alon Near, bass; Lukasz Zyta, drums.

Ordering info: lynnearriale.com

Mina Cho's Grace Beat Quartet
Beat Mirage
INTERNATIONAL GUGAK JAZZ INSTITUTE

★★★★

Boston-based pianist-composer Mina Cho understands that, in the arts, originality stems from a clear understanding and assimilation of first principles. That's evident from the signifying title of Cho's fifth album. A theology major in college before she left Seoul, her hometown, for a Berklee scholarship in the early '00s, Cho has evolved a personal "Korean jazz" hybrid from her painstaking investigations of Korea's various traditional idioms, which, on different projects, she's cross-pollinated with well-researched folk forms from Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba, Greece, Turkey, West Africa, contemporary gospel and swing, synthesizing these influences in organic, unpredictable ways.

On the surface, the songs on *Beat Mirage* are simple, each imbued with its own hybridized dance and melodic line, to which Cho applies an informed harmonic sensibility and a penchant for metric modulation, impeccably rendered by the Seoul-based drum tandem. Yeonglin Kim selects and tunes the drum components and curates the cymbals of his drumkit to complement the various tonalities Insoo Kim extracts from the traditional janggu drum, the kkwaenggwari and jing gongs, and the barrel-shaped sori-buk. Surefooted bassist Max Ridley contributes several cogent extended passages (check his arco solo on "Prints Of Imperfection" and his elegant pizzicato dialog with the leader on the son-like "If There's A Stage For Me In Heaven") and plays his parts impeccably, but Cho is the main solo voice, imparting the array of attacks, orchestral technique, affinity for stylistic code-jumping and soulful brio her pieces require. *—Ted Panken*

Beat Mirage: Nacht Song; A Bit Of Grace; Beat Mirage; G-Street Dance; Prints Of Imperfection; Parallel Destiny (Unmyung II); If There's A Stage For Me In Heaven. (42:42)
Personnel: Mina Cho, piano; Insoo Kim, Korean traditional percussion (janggu, kkwaenggwari, jing, sori-buk); Yeonglin Kim, drums; Max Ridley, bass.

Ordering info: igji.org

COURTESY FRANK CARLBERG

The Frank Carlberg Large Ensemble at work.

Large Ensembles for Grand Visions

What defines a big band in 2024? Perhaps the answer lies not in the size of the band but in the scope of the bandleader's vision. This is evident merely from the naming of Maine-based guitarist/composer Richard Nelson and saxophonist Tim O'Dell's **Makrokosmos Orchestra**: their designs seem more grandiose than what is expected from a 15-piece ensemble. Their debut, ***Dissolve*** **(Adhyåropa; 39:19 ★★★½)**, extends toward a higher plane of compositional achievement, elevating jazz to the lofty realm of modern classical music. In large part, it succeeds (intonation issues aside), especially the title track, a kaleidoscope of contrapuntal themes that weave in and out of the brass and woodwind sections, shifting in and out of time and spatial sensibilities in a mysterious narrative, its peaking followed by a scattering into the ether.
Ordering info: richardnelsonmusic.com

Kim Myhr, from Stavenger, Norway, is also a guitarist/composer and also leads a 15-piece ensemble trending towards contemporary sounds. Yet Myhr's **Kitchen Orchestra** seems to operate in another room of the cosmos than Nelson's, concocting a dish of futuristic minimalism. The orchestration on ***Hereafter*** **(SOFA; 47:21 ★★★)** bears little resemblance to a conventional big band, with two drummers, two bassists, vibraphone, organs and synthesizer, laptop, vocals, a cassette recorder, and then some horns as well. Expansive, ambient spaces contrast with dense, jagged sections of modern groove and guitar. It's all compelling, but the omnipresent electronics are often too present in the mix, brutalizing some of the intricacies. But Myhr can be commended for his innovative instrumentation, illuminating new possibilities.
Ordering info: sofamusic.bandcamp.com

Veteran trumpeter **Jim Rotondi** appears to be in the camp of not fixing what ain't broke, though that aphorism might allow for adding to what works. ***Finesse*** **(Cellar; 1:16:46 ★★★½)** reflects Rotondi's three decades of experience in straightahead big bands, finally getting a large-group vehicle of his own to test drive for the first time. Rotondi's compositions are deftly arranged by Jakob Helling for the Austrian-based Notes and Tones Orchestra, a traditional big band supplemented by strings and additional winds, assisted by the trumpeter's New York friends, saxophonist Dick Oatts, trombonist Steve Davis and pianist Danny Grissett. Those soloists (especially Rotondi) really shine, supported by the delicious variance of color and texture of Helling's arrangements and ensemble. The only thing missing from this fine album is that it feels rather top-heavy. The low brass is there, but aside from a groovy trombone feature aptly titled "For Curtis," their presence overall is somewhat lacking due to the blend and balance decisions by either conductor or engineer.
Ordering info: jimrotondi.com

No such thing can be said of the next album from trombonist **Marshall Gilkes**, who spent four years of his notable career with the formidable, Cologne-based **WDR Big Band.** ***LifeSongs*** **(Alternate Side; 1:28:16 ★★★★)** is Gilkes' third album with his former band, and it is certainly charmed. The ensemble is collectively virtuosic and meticulously balanced, with synchronized power across all sections when pushed, as it is with the writing here. Gilkes' pure silken tone is mirrored in these immaculate orchestrations, his original compositions sunny and melodic, his themes fully developed into complete pieces. There is, of course, plenty of great 'bone writing here, and that section responds beautifully. But the whole jazz orchestra is at its best blending and balancing over a harvest bounty of chorale-like passages that can either float or swing, finding an elusive balance between relaxed, controlled professionalism and emotive urgency. One would be hard-pressed to find a more gorgeous jazz band playing such perfectly written charts.
Ordering info: marshallgilkes.bandcamp.com

Gorgeous perfection would seem to factor not in pianist/composer **Frank Carlberg**'s ugly-beauty vision about what a big band could achieve. His 2017 foray into exploring the music of Thelonious Monk produced the remarkable effort *Monk Dreams, Hallucinations And Nightmares* (Red Piano), which captured the raw, unpredictable genius of the bebop master in big band form. Seven years later, the long-anticipated follow-up has arrived in ***Elegy For Thelonious*** **(Sunnyside; 59:39 ★★★★½)**, and there is no sign of a sophomore slump. As on the first album, Carlberg isn't arranging Monk's tunes as much as he is re-imagining them, expanding those familiar strains into mutations that ultimately overwhelm the original host. The tone is set from the outset with a literal mashup of Monk's "Skippy" with its standard of origin, "Tea For Two," which Monk had reharmonized into near-oblivion for his own version of the tune. In a similar fashion, Carlberg is allowing the spirit of Monk to move past what was done to what is possible. The results are bold and bawdy, big enough for this big band to do justice to a true giant of jazz. **DB**
Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

Gili Lopes
Algures
INDEPENDENT RELEASE
★★★★

Brazilian bassist Gili Lopes has delivered a sparkling debut. Comprising six originals and two arrangements of classics from Wayne Shorter and Milton Nascimiento, *Algures* shows that more unites diasporic musical traditions than simply a desire to build a temporary bridge across cultural difference. In these tunes, there is a sensibility that brings the music toward the fount of each component tradition and then exceeds it. The substance of that excess if fully realized across several tracks where the Lopes-led ensemble "gathers together" — as Dizzy Gillespie once put it — all the musical "information" required to produce new beauty in and of this moment.

On "Famara," about midway through the proceedings, we find possibly the best evidence of this approach. The track moves across and beyond the aesthetic of the jazz ballad by adding the rhythmic inflection of Afro-Brazilian samba via percussionist Rogerio Boccato.

And if that were not enough, there is also a nod to the sounds of North Africa. The reason this works is perhaps because in Lopes' compositions there is no desire to overwhelm. He has acquired the resolve of many bassists to let the music live and breathe — to let groove work on us.

The project's cohesiveness emanates from the chemistry of long-time collaborators Vinicius Gomes on guitar and pianist Helio Alves and the prodigious playing of veterans on the scene including saxophonist John Ellis and Ari Hoenig who takes over the drummer's chair. Lopes, who now resides in New York City, has more than arrived with *Algures*.

—Joshua Myers

Algures: Antalya; De Longe; Infant Eyes; Yalla; The Fortress; Famara; Outubro; Barrinha. (62:05)
Personnel: Gili Lopes, bass; Vinicius Gomes, guitar; Helio Alves, piano; Rogerio Boccato, percussion (1, 5, 6, 8); John Ellis, saxophone; Ari Hoenig, drums.

Ordering info: gililopes.bandcamp.com

Julian Lage

Julian Lage
Speak To Me
BLUE NOTE
★★★★½

Julian Lage is a singularly gifted, genre-defying guitarist whose instincts often transcend his instrument. On the eclectic *Speak To Me*, Lage's skills are always in service of the song. Whether he's patiently caressing each sparsely picked steel string acoustic note on the plaintive "Hymnal," summoning up a longing mood on "Serenade" or stinging with solidbody electric intensity on the raunch 'n' blues number "Northern Shuffle," the chameleonic guitarist is capable of plugging into just the right spirit for each tune.

His virtuosity comes to the fore on the unaccompanied "Myself Around You," a stunning showcase of his command, while he plays it simple like a strumming troubadour on the upbeat "Omission." The adventurous "South Mountain" sounds like a jam between John Fahey and Louis Sclavis at John Cage's house, then it's on to "spy music" territory on the title track. Shifting gears once again, "Two And One" finds the guitarist on acoustic guitar in medium-tempo-swing-blues mode alongside resolute bassist Jorge Roeder and flexible drummer Dave King, whose Elvinesque pulse on "Tiburon" spurs Lage. "76" is a rollicking boogie number with avant flourishes (courtesy of Kris Davis' piano), and the restful "Nothing Happens Here" closes *Speak To Me* on a cozy note. Lage is indeed all over the place here, and he wears each tune like a snug-fitting new suit of clothes.

—Bill Milkowski

Speak To Me: Hymnal; Northern Shuffle; Omission; Serenade; Myself Around You; South Mountain; Speak To Me; Two And One; Vanishing Points; Tiburon; As It Were; 76; Nothing Happens Here. (60:55)
Personnel: Julian Lage, acoustic and electric guitars; Jorge Roeder, double bass, electric bass (3, 6), vibraphone (1); Dave King, drums; Patrick Warren, synth strings (1, 6, 9, 10), organ (2, 7, 8, 12, 13); Kris Davis, piano (2, 6, 9, 12, 13); Levon Henry, tenor saxophone (2, 7, 12), alto saxophone (13), clarinet (6), alto clarinet (9).

Ordering info: bluenote.com

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STEPHANIE MATTHEWS @ A TRIBE FOR JAZZ

Irabagon has simultaneously released two albums on his own label, Irabbagast Records, with *Recharge The Blade* and *Survivalism*.

JON IRABAGON'S ABSURDIST TENDENCIES

If ever were an artist earned the label "enigma," it would be saxophonist Jon Irabagon, whose hyper-genre career has warped repeatedly between the narrow straightahead paths and wide-open free spaces of the larger jazz universe.

How else to describe one who travels to South Dakota to improvise on wildlife mating calls in abandoned munitions bunkers, and who devotes an entire album to horrific techniques humans have developed throughout history to maim and murder each other?

Irabagon's enigmatic antics continue with two simultaneous releases on his own label, Irabbagast Records, with *Recharge The Blade*, an intense-yet-spirited, mostly quintet album with the leader on soprano saxophone, assisted by trombonist Ray Anderson, pianist Matt Mitchell, bassist Chris Lightcap and drummer Dan Weiss; and *Survivalism*, a mostly free improv album for solo soprillo, the smallest and highest-pitched of the saxophone family. Irabagon's penchant for introducing two albums at a time of drastically differing music hasn't enamored him with critics. He recounts an experience from a previous dual release: "The reviewer said one of these records is one of the best that came out this year and one of these records is the worst … . I like that for some reason. That makes me feel my music is alive because the same person can love and hate me at the same time."

Irabagon, rather engaging and jovial for an enigma, is a second-generation Filipino-American from Chicago who spent nearly two decades in New York before relocating back to his hometown. "I moved there about a week before September 11th happened, and I left during the pandemic — my New York stay was sandwiched by disasters," he says over video from Chicago. While in New York, Irabagon exploded into public consciousness as the winner of the 2008 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Saxophone Competition (besting Walter Smith III and Tim Green among others), and again with the Moppa Elliott-led group Mostly Other People Do the Killing, which gained notoriety in 2014 for releasing *Blue* (Hot Cup), a note-for-note group transcription of Miles Davis' iconic 1959 album *Kind Of Blue* (Columbia).

Winning the Monk Competition awarded Irabagon a one-record deal with Concord, that resulted in the well-crafted but conventional *The Observer* (2009). Yet he had already released two significantly different albums under his own name, including *Jon Irabagon's Outright!* (Innova 2008), featuring a forward-leaning quintet with trumpeter Russ Johnson and pianist Kris Davis. It became an album concept perpetuated by Irabagon in later iterations, with *Recharge The Blade* completing (for now) the trilogy he had envisioned.

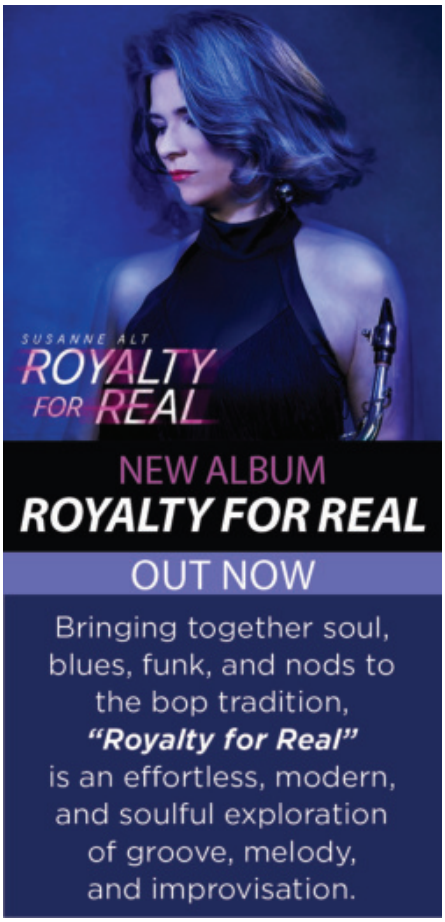
"Several things happen throughout all three of the *Outright!* trilogy records," Irabagon explains. "They're all me on a different instrument [for each album], paying homage in a way compositionally to all the giants that I love on those three individual instruments [alto, tenor, soprano]." For *Recharge*, Steve Lacy, Roscoe Mitchell, John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter and even Sidney Bechet loom in the backdrop of Irabagon's writing and playing. Another carry-over is to have a "shredding guitar solo" on one of the pieces, done eloquently by Ben Monder on "Quorum Call."

Irabagon reveals another tidbit: "Each of the albums has a tune that's dedicated to a villain I love that I'm just fascinated by." The latest antagonist came from the Marvel television series *Jessica Jones*, a show he got hooked on during the COVID lockdown. "Man, Kilgrave, he was super cool to me because he could control people's minds to get them to do whatever [he wanted]," he gushes. His "Kilgrave" is completely improvised, save for the piano part, which is through-composed and entirely written out, casting pianist Matt Michell as the master mind-controller.

In addition to *Jessica Jones*, Irabagon binged *The Sopranos* and read novels during the lockdown. "I don't think I was depressed," he offers unconvincingly. "It's just at some point, reading Cormac McCarthy, watching a mob series, and with all the COVID stuff going on, I realized humans are the best at destroying themselves."

He started becoming obsessed with the notion. "Maybe, I was depressed because I did a ton of research on that stuff … . I kept trying to talk to my wife, like, did you know that they used to drag bodies underneath ships? She was like, we need to watch some comedy." Nevertheless, Irabagon channeled his morbid fascination into the music, themes and titles for *Recharge The Blade*.

Irabagon was finally able to get some fresh air when they relocated for a time during the pandemic to South Dakota, to get away from New York, closer to his wife's family. He spent many hours in the woods, practicing saxophone [and recording it]. At some point, he ventured away from the forest to the town of Igloo, where more than 800 abandoned bunkers are located, origi-



nally built by the U.S. Government to house munitions. The lands are now used for cattle grazing, but many are or will be repurposed into luxury survival bunkers, catering to those who have literally bought into Irabagon's dark vision of humanity.

But the upside is that those bunkers have amazing reverb. Irabagon realized that the sound was ideal for his next solo project for soprillo saxophone, a tiny instrument about the size of a travel mug, one octave higher than a soprano. Two years later, Irabagon returned to the bunkers, armed only with his soprillo and a bunch of wild-game calls used for hunting.

The resultant album, *Survivalist*, is an exercise in novelty and — possibly for the listener — courageous endurance. Irabagon experimented with placing his game calls before, beneath and between the parts of his tiny saxophone. One no longer needs to imagine what the dying screams of a young, semi-large mammal being butchered alive might sound like. The killing sounds are gorgeously captured by the recording, enhanced by the bunker's luscious reverb. "The reverb acted as a duet partner," he remembers. "It definitely affected how I played. It definitely changed all the plans I was making and prepping for the record."

One change was to include two standards: Thelonious Monk's "Reflections" and Charles Mingus' "Duke Ellington's Sound Of Love." Their presence serves to highlight Irabagon's struggle to achieve technical and timbral control from a difficult instrument, to ultimately produce what sounds like beauty, if only — as Monk might posit — ugly beauty.

Irabagon readily admits to an irreverent, if not absurdist, attitude toward life and its symbolic counterpart, art. "I've always been a prankster and a jokester," he says. "I love being serious enough that you can have fun with something because you invested so much seriousness into it, and I love the humor aspect of the music that Charlie Parker and Sonny Rollins brought to the table decades ago." Irabagon's own absurd humor marches briskly during the last track of *Recharge*, "Welcome Parade," a tribute to the undisputed best (selling) soprano saxophonist, Kenneth Gorelick, beginning as a faithful facsimile before devolving into a howling wall of sound from more than 100 musicians who sent Irabagon audio for the track.

"Life means you're [getting] pretty dark pretty fast, and pretty depressing really fast, and so absurdism is something where you can laugh, you can see what a crazy situation we're in here," he offers. "I think being able to face that and admit what's happening is definitely a part of where I come from musically and personally.

"Being able to play music and being able to feel free enough to express my musical angle and my philosophies through the music — it's been a life saver."

Along with a bit of gallows humor.

—Gary Fukushima

Tomas Janzon - guitar, Steve Nelson - vibes, Hill Greene - bass, Chuck McPherson - drums, Jeff Littleton - bass, Tony Austin - drums

"Tomas Janzon continues to surprise as an impressive guitarist, writer and composer, clearly evident on *Nomadic*." *-Ken Dryden, NYC Jazz Record.*

"Nomadic is filled with bright moments, subtle creativity..." *-Scott Yanow, Jazz Monthly.*

"there is a natural telepathy passing between the Nelson and Janzon...tasteful and consistently engaging guitar artistry" *-Joe Lang, Jersey Jazz.*

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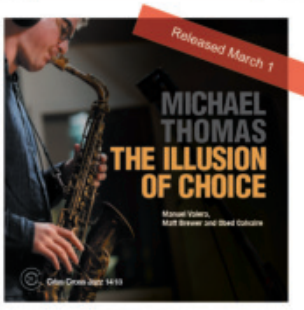

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COURTESY MYLES WRIGHT

"I try to strike just the right balance of paying tribute to the original and also injecting new life into the music," says composer/arranger Myles Wright about his new album of music inspired by classic video game tunes.

MYLES WRIGHT'S GAMING MUSIC

Australian composer/arranger Myles Wright chose the repertoire for his latest self-produced release, *Gamer*, with particular care. He was adapting classic gaming soundtracks for jazz orchestra and these tunes, though utterly captivating, didn't always translate easily into the modern jazz vernacular.

But "having written big band arrangements on and off for the last 20 years or so, I have developed a reasonable intuition as to what will work for a large jazz ensemble and what won't," the Perth musician wrote in an email correspondence with DownBeat.

By Wright's own admission, his creative process tends to be "slow and steady," and the album was a long time in coming. He first developed the concept for *Gamer* 22 years ago in response to an observation: Each time he listened to the music from the video games he'd played as a teenager, memories would come flooding back.

He took to arranging these indelible sonorities in 2017 and launched *Gamer* in January as a tribute to those early gaming compositions.

"It's just great music," he said.

On this, Wright speaks from a position of authority. Not only did he study jazz composition and arranging at Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (graduating a few years ahead of bassist Linda May Han Oh), but he completed a master's degree in studio jazz writing at the University of Miami's Frost School. Later, during stints in Los Angeles and New York, he turned out two luscious big band albums: *The LA EP* and *The Manhattan EP*, respectively. And back in his native Australia, he continues to compose scores across genres for film, theater and television.

The 16 tracks on *Gamer* build deftly on this extensive experience — to a slightly different purpose. Where Wright's previous work firmly established his bona fides as a composer, the new album shows off his skills as an arranger. In this regard, the task at hand — to revamp the looped earworms of 1990s computer games into contemporary art music — brought with it specific challenges.

The first was the nature of the original video soundtracks, written by innovative composers of differing musical backgrounds at a time when video scoring was still an emerging art form. Among these were Tim Follin, the exceptionally creative programmer who created the Plok! soundtracks, and Koji Kondo, who first started writing for Super Mario in 1985 and has remained the primary composer for the franchise ever since.

"Some of the music featured on *Gamer* was easy to adapt," Wright said. "For example, some of the Plok! tracks — they already sound quite jazzy in their original form. Other soundtracks required a lot more work to bring into the jazz idiom. 'Super Castlevania IV: Ending Theme' is essentially an orchestral adagio work, which had to be transformed into a jazz ballad. "Prince Of Persia" wasn't straightforward, either, having more of a Middle Eastern flavor in its original format."

In adapting the randomly brilliant efforts of these early gaming composers, Wright's formal training in orchestration proved essential. Especially, he explained, his understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each instrument and how they might support the melodic action.

Thus, cheery flutes introduce the casual bounce of "Plok! Going Underground," while a full-throttle horn section lends dynamic heft to "Plok! Going Home." Simple piano

voicings frame a lone trumpet on "Castlevania-IV-Ending," the most contemplative track on the recording. And animated percussion — including Persian instruments — push the relentless motion of the four Prince of Persia selections.

Equally important, Wright's first-hand experience of the technological advancements in gaming music gave him insight into not only the limitations under which the early video composers worked, but how he might adapt their music for a modern audience.

For instance, Kondo wrote the Mario Brothers "Overworld" theme — one of the most iconic in the gaming world — as a simple melody for single-channel audio, long before sampling, CD-ROMs and streaming allowed for greater complexity in video game music. To contemporize a theme like this, Wright might play with the form, add a countermelody, reharmonize the chordal structure, or alter the groove.

One hears how ingeniously Wright employs such devices on his reworking of Kondo's jangly tune. First, he initiates the familiar melody at the top, dulcet in the reeds section, before introducing his own motivic ideas, fleshed out with rambunctious horns and a banjo tethered to the rhythm. He then escalates into full swing mode, modulating into vibrant improvisations, exciting band sections, and a triumphant outro. The tune stands on its own as a statement for big band — just as Wright had envisioned.

"I try to strike just the right balance of paying tribute to the original and also injecting new life into the music," he said.

Long-standing video gamers will be pleased to note that the "Overworld" theme is just one of four Super Mario tracks on the album release — and that these album tracks are just some of the adaptations that Wright has on offer.

In fact, he pulled these cuts from a larger piece, an entire suite of cleverly arranged music from Super Mario that appears as a single entity only on Wright's YouTube channel. There are other nostalgia-filled finds there, too, among the material that didn't make it onto the album — such as his arrangements of themes from The Legend of Zelda and Gradius III, games that were developed, like Mario, in the mid-1980s.

Of note, too, among Wright's live videos is the performance of his contemporary jazz piece "Pair Up: Duo for Marimba and Trombone," from 2010.

Now that *Gamer* has wrapped, Wright says, he'll return to composing, this time using "Pair Up" as the seed for a classical/jazz chamber ensemble featuring trombone and percussion.

The duo composition was "surprisingly well received, so I figure it's high time I write more for this combination of instruments," he said. "And writing for two or three instruments can be just as challenging as a larger ensemble, but in a different way. So I know I'll continue to grow as a writer."

—Suzanne Lorge

COURTESY OF CARL STRØMER

Rick Margitza's new book from Sher Music features cover artwork by Silvia Kleyff.

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

In my recently published book *365 Days Of Practice* (Sher Music), I use the phrase "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants" as the title for the acknowledgements page. I've also decided to use is at the title for this article, which will reference techniques and concepts covered in the book and present new material as well. I will show how to build on traditional bebop language and gradually transform it into a more contemporary sound. In my book, the first chapter is dedicated to a practice method I developed as a result of my time spent studying with saxophonist Gary Campbell. Here is an excerpt from the beginning of that chapter:

Practice Sequence

This method of practice is something I learned from the great Gary Campbell when I studied with him at the University of Miami in 1983. It is referred to throughout this book as "the routine" and a thorough understanding of how it works will greatly enhance not only your experience of the material presented here, but will enrich and inform your own musical explorations. There are two main components of this method. The first being the Practice Sequence which deals with directional combinations and second, the Intervallic Families, which is based on the division of the octave.

The Practice Sequence is designed to make sure that you work through whatever you are practicing in all directional combinations. On the first page of examples in this chapter, you are given the basic layout. The four directions are 1) up, 2) down, 3) up-down and 4) down-up. And the two global directions are A: Ascending and B: Descending. When we combine these elements, we end up with 1A through 4B.

This is a very effective way to work on basic material, and the examples given here illustrate how to implement this technique while working on diatonic thirds. [See Example 1.] As you can see, 1A has the thirds going up as you ascend the scale, and 1B has the thirds going up as you descend. 2A has the thirds going down as you ascend, and then 2B has them going down as you descend. 3A through 4B follow the same scheme except the thirds are now alternating directions.

The next step is to substitute diatonic fourths for thirds and then fifths, sixths, sevenths, etc. This should be done, of course, in all keys. The next step is to do the same thing: thirds through sevenths in all directional combinations but working through melodic minor keys. So, diatonic thirds in C major might not be a challenge, but sixths in A♭ melodic minor might take a little more time. You can then pick any other type of scale and work it through this matrix. The goal here is to have a rock-solid foundation and control of these basic elements in all keys.

Intervallic Families

Next, let's take a look at the second part of the chapter that deals with the Intervallic Families (see Example 2):

The Intervallic Families concept is based on the division of the octave, not unlike a lot of the material in the book *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns* by Nicolas Slonimsky. Each division of the octave yields a specific intervallic family. In the following examples you can see the first division divides the octave into 12 parts and gives us the chromatic family. The second one division is one of whole steps, which gives us the whole-tone family. Note that in order to include all 12 tones, there are two groups of whole tones, or two whole-tone families.

The next two groups are minor thirds–the diminished family and major thirds–the augmented family. Note that when we say diminished and augmented family, we are not talking about diminished or augmented scales, but just the groups of minor or major thirds and the sounds they represent.

The next group of intervals is fourths. This group obviously doesn't divide the octave but is the next type of interval. I call this the cyclic group. The last two groups are tritones and fifths. After that every other type of interval is related to one of the previous groups through inversion: minor sixths = major thirds, major sixths = minor thirds, minor sevenths = whole steps and major sevenths = half steps.

These groups/families should be memo-

rized, as visualization while practicing is an important component of this type of work. Another indispensable aspect of this method is having the ability to hear what these groups sounds like. Think of developing a catalog of these sounds in your mind's ear. The next step is where things become more interesting and challenging. We will see how to combine the directional combinations with the intervallic families.

Levels of Complexity

The book goes into much more detail regarding both concepts, but for the purposes of this article, this basic outline is all that is needed. *365 Days of Practice* offers an idea to work on for each day of the year. Many of them were developed using this practice method. They range from very basic to very complex. What I want to illustrate here is a concept that I call "levels of complexity":

- Level 1: Controlling major and melodic minor scales without the use of chromatic passing tones (Day #24 in *365 Days of Practice*).
- Level 2: Developing the ability to use chromatic passing tones and enclosures (Days #25–27).
- Level 3: Altering the colors of each of the chords., e.g., ionian to lydian or lydian augmented, mixolydian to altered, etc. (Days #15, #18, #36 and several others).
- Level 4: Superimposing extended, polytonal harmonies. (There are numerous examples throughout the book.) In Example 3 on page 62, I've chosen to use the first 16 bars of "Cherokee" to illustrate these concepts.

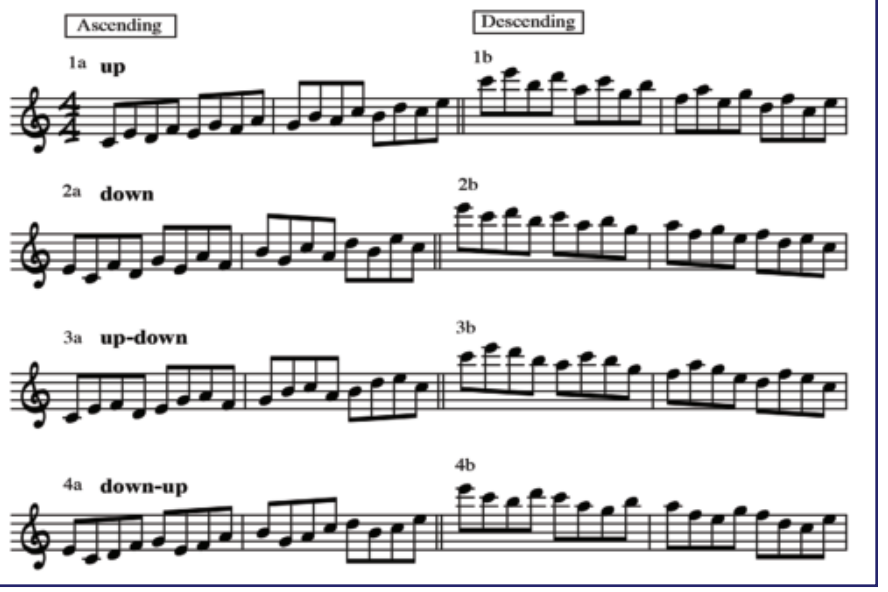
Chromatic Embellishment

Chromatic embellishment is a general term that I use that includes the use of the descending bebop scale (half step between the root and dominant seventh) and all the various versions of the ascending and descending major bebop scales. Check out the many videos on this subject that are based on the teachings of master Barry Harris. Under this general heading, I also include the use of upper and lower approach notes (half steps above or below the target chord tone) and enclosures: the use of both upper and lower approaches. Trumpeter Clifford Brown was a master of this technique.

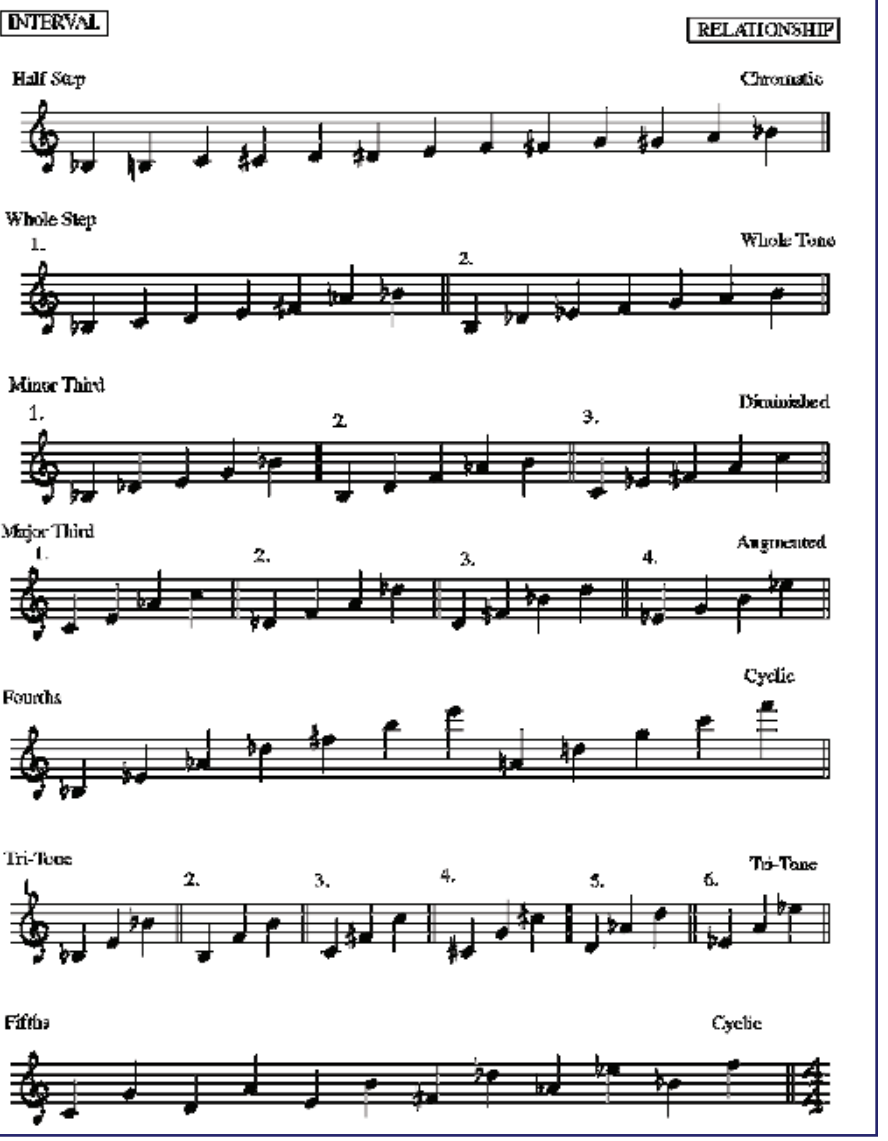
I've found that most younger, less experienced players tend to avoid or shy away from these "avoid" notes. As a result, their lines tend to sometimes sound awkward because the guide tones end up falling on weak parts of the measure. Besides the color that these passing/approach tones add, one of their main functions is to place the target notes on the strong beats of the measure.

That being said, I feel that it is extremely important to be able to master the technique of *not* using these chromatic notes, i.e., to impro-

Example 1



Example 2



Example 3

vise using nothing but the appropriate major or melodic minor scales. This is step 1, the goal here being to develop the ability to hear and feel the "right notes in the right places."

Once you are able to confidently hear and play melodies without the use of these "avoid" notes, you're ready for step 2, which involves using the chromatic passing tones and enclosures. They become natural extensions of your melodic conception, thus adding color and interest to your lines. As mentioned above, step 3 in this process deals with altering the qualities of each chord. And, finally, step 4 uses extended harmonic techniques.

With all of these concepts in mind, I present my full etude on "Cherokee" (see Example 3), which brings all of these concepts together for practice and study purposes. In Line 1, notice that I used nothing but the notes in the corresponding major or melodic minor (lydian dominant chords) scales. Line 2 is based on the melodies and melodic shapes of Line 1, but with added chromatic embellishments. Line 3 shows how to change the quality of specific chords. Line 4 uses extended, polytonal and superimposed harmony. This is where the concept of the Intervallic Families comes into play — in this example, mainly major third relationships.

In these examples, the objective was to illustrate the concepts mentioned above. They are mostly eighth-note based; rhythmic variety is purposefully ignored.

Note that in Line 1 and Line 2, at no time am I thinking of any harmonic tensions or extensions — only scales (Line 1) and then chromatic embellishments (Line 2). Once these two techniques are absorbed and become second nature, the next level of complexity (Line 3) comes into play. After all these levels are mastered, we get to the point where we start hearing and using extended and superimposed harmonies (Line 4).

Of course, the trajectory of study does not have to be completely linear and there are many shades between the four levels of complexity. One could explore Level 4 while still working on Level 2. In fact, I still spend time working on Level 1, as it informs what I use when I'm superposing extended harmonies … because at the end of the day, the basis of all these levels is still melody. **DB**

Rick Margitza, a Detroit-born musician trained in classical and jazz saxophone, has played with renowned artists like McCoy Tyner and Miles Davis. He has released 10 albums, composed orchestral works and is part of the group Gypsy Tenors. Residing in Paris since 2003, Margitza is also involved in jazz education, conducting master classes worldwide. His recent recorded works include *Cheap Thrills* (Summit) featuring the South Florida Jazz Orchestra and *Sacred Hearts* (Le Coq). Margitza's new book *365 Days of Practice* (Sher Music) is a guide on how to deepen your practice routine and enlarge your melodic palette. The exercises cover a spectrum of musical ideas that range from basic bebop language to its transformation into contemporary jazz. Purchase *365 Days of Practice* online at shermusic.com.

STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

JAZZ EDUCATION NETWORK

Providing student musicians with the opportunities they need to advance their musical careers is one of the cornerstones of the Jazz Education Network mission. Each year, we proudly recognize talented, hardworking, aspiring students with a passion for jazz through our scholarship program.

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FRANK SCHEMMANN

David Murray, center, with his Brave New World trio mates, bassist Brad Jones, right, and percussionist Hamid Drake.

David Murray's Tenor Sax Solo on 'Metouka Sheli'

Having been such an important part of the development of jazz from the 1970s through now, transcribing one solo by saxophonist/composer David Murray doesn't do justice to his body of work or its effect on the shape of jazz — but that's what we're going to do anyway. Murray recently put out an album by his Brave New World trio, *Seriana Promethea* (Intakt), and it includes the ballad "Metouka Sheli," on which Murray demonstrates his abilities with non-functional chord changes at a slow tempo over only a bass line (and drums).

Slow tempi such as this lend themselves to a rhythmic freedom, where notes can be placed at varying spots from behind, to ahead of, the beat. Murray uses this freedom wonderfully, but due to that the written rhythms are really only approximations of his playing. I strongly suggest listening to the track and if possible playing along to learn how to shade rhythm in this way. Also, the manner in which the chords move led to some spelling issues. Rather than use "correct" spellings, there are points where I decided to instead present it in the manner that I felt would be easiest to read. It is presented in concert key but one octave transposed.

One thing about this improvisation that I find find particularly intriguing is Murray's intervalic approach, especially in regard to fourths and fifths (which are inversions of each other), which he uses in some very provocative ways and which break up the scalar approach that is more often employed, both here by Murray and in soloing in general.

We first hear theses intervals in the second and third measures from C up to G followed by B♭ descending to E♭. The fifth is considered the most consonant interval after the octave, but in both of these instances Murray doesn't place them on the root and fifth of the chord. The C and G are played on a D♭, so we get major seventh up to sharp four. For the B♭ to E♭ they are seventh and third of the Bmaj7 (one of the spelling issues I mentioned), which is a bit more consonant, but coming from the D♭ it obscures the sound of the Bmaj7 a bit. Murray is using the absence of a chordal instrument to his advantage when playing these sort of licks.

He steps up these ideas in bar 7, where we hear two fifths: first, down from E to A, and then up from A to E. The A natural isn't part of the E7 chord, and doesn't resolve to the third, and Murray doesn't seem to care. (He ends this bar with an ascending fourth to move us to the next harmony.)

Next, check out the end of bar 9 and beginning of bar 10. On the Fm7, there's the A♭ to D natural (a sharp fourth) and then dropping down over an octave to play C up to G, another fifth that obscures the harmony (fifth to ninth). But notice how the descending ninth from D to C is transposed down a fifth to G to F. This use of intervals is a very different approach from the scales and chord tones one often favored in jazz and jazz education.

Which is shown in the very next bar, the up-a-fifth/down-a-step idea starting on the E (the major seventh) but from the A at the end of this idea he recapitulates it. To me this is particularly brilliant because he doesn't wait

until the lick is finished and then play it a fourth up. Instead the final note of the first iteration is the beginning of the second. Also, the way these tones relate to the Fmaj7: 7–#4–3–7–6. It fits, but doesn't create a strong sense of the harmony.

Toward the end of bar 16 we hear some stacked intervals. Right after the descending fourth of F to C he puts another fourth on top of that: B♭–F–C. Since it's a D♭7, the C natural is not part of the chord, but again, Murray can get away with it as the seventh isn't occurring in the bass line. For him the intervalic approach is more important in this instance than defining the changes. (One could make the argument that I should have written "D♭maj7" as the chord since the C makes it sound like that, but I feel I'd rather have the original changes, or at least what I think they are, evident so we can see what the improviser was working from and when and how they deviate from it.)

We hear some more fourths and fifths spuriously throughout bars 17 and 18, but in measure 19 he steps it up. This seems to be what he's been leading to: descending fourths a whole step apart followed by ascending fourths and fifths. This entire bar is composed almost entirely of pairs of fourths and fifths, some with little relation to the underlying chord. This is sort of recapped in bar 23, only here it is only descending fourths and they move down in an almost scalar fashion. However, Murray is drawing them all from the C phrygian scale, so they do relate to the chord.

The next bar opens up exploring more of this, but we have another stacked interval lick, from a high D♭ down through A♭ and E♭ to B♭. These kind of quartal ideas were the rage in jazz for a bit, but Murray incorporates them along with scalar and arpeggios in a way that doesn't call attention to them, but also adds a contrasting flavor. I also want to point out that Murray has been increasing his use of these intervals, and so developing his solo and leading our ears to them, rather than just hitting us with a bunch of stacked fourths and fifths straight out of the box (which might also have been cool. Try out both approaches when you're playing).

Measure 24 also commences with a string of descending fourths, even stacking them going down from the B♭, and the beginnings of 25 and 27. In fact, at this stage fourths and fifths have just become part of the sound of this improvisation, and Murray is freely inserting them whether singly (the one descending fifth from B♭ to E♭ at the beginning of 29), grouped and/or stacked (bar 32 has that fantastic descent from the high B♭ to the low A♭ and then back up again), or even smaller groupings (in the middle of measure 30 there is an A♭–E♭–B♭ group followed by a simple E♭ triad). Very often these grouping aren't used to define the changes but to create sounds that seem "inside" yet are also sort of "out." **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. He recently released an album of Indian classical music played on the string bass, titled *Border Of Hiranyaloka*. Find out more at jimidurso.bandcamp.com.

JodyJazz DV HR Tenor Saxophone Mouthpiece

Hard Rubber 'DV' Design Achieves Cutting Power, Projection & Authoritative Tone

JodyJazz has introduced the DV HR Tenor mouthpiece, adding to its popular DV HR Alto model launched early last year. The DV HR models are the first hard rubber mouthpieces to feature the company's patented DV design. The new DV HR Tenor is available in size 6 (.090), 7 (.101), 7* (.108), 8* (.116) and 9* (.125) tip openings.

The DV HR Tenor uses the patented DV secondary window — located below the primary window on the flat undersurface where the table meets the reed — to add mid and low harmonics, resulting in a more authoritative tone than your typical tenor saxophone mouthpiece provides. The long, straight, somewhat high baffle gives the mouthpiece fantastic projection and cutting power along with strong altissimo response.

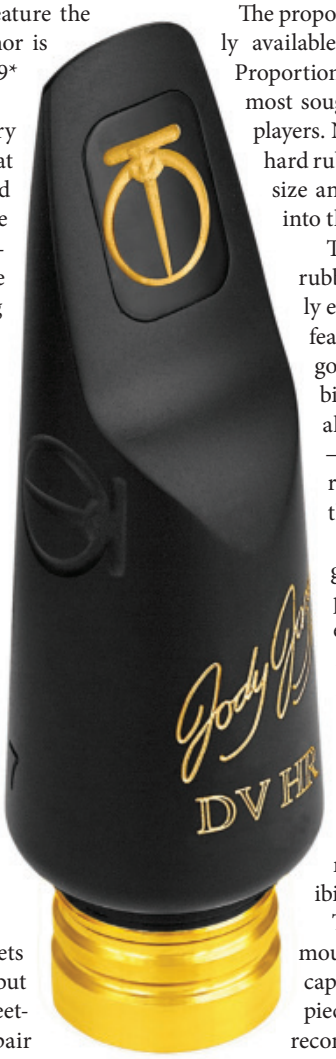
Play-testing the DV HR Tenor was an energizing experience right from the start. I went with the 7* version and a medium-hard reed, aiming for a combination of power and control. With its near-effortless response and free-blowing nature, shimmering highs and booming lows, I was able to achieve a formidable roar. The versatile mouthpiece not only wailed when called upon, it was highly cooperative when it came to subtle changes in dynamics and subtone playing. I found I could easily cover a full sonic spectrum of the tenor, from ringing brightness to subdued dark tones.

I also found playing the DV HR Tenor to be a liberating experience. With so much positive feedback coming from the piece, I found myself in a state of inspired creativity, with ideas coming to me one right after the other. I was inspired to push my playing into the ecstatic zone, where the DV HR really livened up, leaving me energized and ready for more — instead of becoming exhausted by the tremendous effort such playing requires when using other tenor mouthpieces.

Like most saxophonists, I seek a mouthpiece that lets me play a with enough volume and highs to be heard but leaves me plenty of room to play expressively, even sweetly. The DV HR Tenor fit that bill perfectly. On a recent pair of big band gigs, I had no problem whatsoever toning down the brightness in order to blend with the rest of the section and take part in a group sound reminiscent of the swing era. When playing the Tenor II book, I couldn't help but notice how full and well-rounded my middle-register notes and bell tones sounded.

"The DV HR Tenor is a fun and exciting mouthpiece from the moment you play it," said Jody Espina, founder and owner of JodyJazz Inc. "You will be able to scream, cry and soothe with this versatile mouthpiece. It's made to be your 'one mouthpiece.' Play one note, and we think you will be instantly convinced."

You can cover a lot of stylistic ground with the DV HR Tenor. With its crisp attack and invigorating resonance, it's suitable for playing straightahead jazz, smooth jazz, Latin, funk, rock or fusion. If you emulate contemporary players like Michael Brecker, Gerald Albright, Maceo Parker, David Sanborn, Jeff Coffin, Eric Marienthal and Kirk Whalum, you can't go wrong with a DV HR mouthpiece for alto or tenor. The highly recommended DV HR Alto comes in size 5 (.072), 6 (.078), 7 (.083) and 8 (.090) tip openings.



The proportions of JodyJazz's DV series mouthpieces, originally available in metal, are derived from the Golden Mean Proportions found in nature. Today, they remain one of the most sought-after mouthpieces among jazz and commercial players. Now that those special proportions are available in a hard rubber mouthpiece, saxophonists who prefer the shape, size and feel of ebonite over metal have the ability to tap into the power and sizzle of the DV design.

The DV HR series models are the first JodyJazz hard rubber mouthpieces to feature a bite plate that's actually embedded into the beak of the mouthpiece. The plate features the company's iconic "Phi" symbol logo in gold, a characteristic of the classic DV series. The new bite plate not only looks cool; it's also highly functional, as it provides a cushioned grip to steady your chops — not to hard, not too soft, but just right. JodyJazz recommends using a mouthpiece cushion on top of the bite plate for added comfort and protection.

The DV HR Tenor features a stylized, 24-karat gold-plated brass ring on the shank of the mouthpiece. The distinctive profile of the ring was also created using the golden mean proportions. The ring adds more mass on the shank of the mouthpiece, which results in more stability, more body in the sound and increased harmonics. Likewise, the meticulously finished facing curve of the DV HR Tenor incorporates golden mean proportions to provide ease of playing while allowing for unrestricted musical expression. As on the original JodyJazz DV metal mouthpieces, the optimized facing fosters tonal flexibility and a substantial amount of thrust.

The DV HR Tenor mouthpiece comes with a deluxe mouthpiece pouch but does not include a ligature and cap. If you already have a hard rubber tenor mouthpiece, your current ligature should fit the DV HR. I also recommend trying one of JodyJazz Power Ring ligatures (in particular, the HRT1 Gold and HRT1S Silver models, as well as the Hand-Hammered HRT1HHG Gold and HRT1HHRG Rose Gold models). The Power Ring features a concave inner design that reduces the touch points on the reed, maximizing reed vibration. It has no moving or added parts, increasing the efficiency of vibration and rendering it incredibly easy to manage. The increased mass and greater wall thickness of the Power Ring ligatures, together with their more contoured shape, increases the amount of harmonics present, allowing for the fullest possible saxophone sound containing high, mid and low frequencies.

Like all JodyJazz mouthpieces, the tip rail, side rails, baffle and table of the DV HR Tenor are all finished by hand. At a price of $495, the DV HR Tenor represents a fantastic deal for serious tenor players who need a flexible mouthpiece that responds instantly, establishes a rock-solid presence and brings a highly refined shine to their sound. *—Ed Enright*

jodyjazz.com

1. New Colors, More Comfort

KHS America has introduced four new finishes for its newly upgraded Jupiter 1100 Performance Series Alto Saxophone. The four limited-edition finishes include Gilded Onyx, Burnished Amber, Natural Brass and Twilight Smoke. They provide exciting alternatives to the existing finish options of gold lacquered brass, all silver-plated and silver-plated with gold lacquer keys. In addition to the new finishes, the upgraded Jupiter 1100 Performance Series Alto Saxophone includes an updated ergonomic key structure, highlighted by optimized placement of levers, side keys and adjustable palm keys. The reimagined setup offers players heightened flexibility and technical facility, while reducing stress and hand fatigue. All 1100 Series saxophones come standard with the Sona-Pure neck, which imbues the instruments with tonal warmth and clarity.

More info: jupitermusic.com/international

2. Pro Flute Options Revealed

Victory Musical Instruments has introduced the Revelation Series of professional. Available in four different open-hole models, each flute in this series boasts exceptional features designed for the discerning musician: White Copper Body/Sterling Silver Headjoint with Offset G and Split-E Mechanism (VTFL-RSSP-O); White Copper Body/Sterling Silver Headjoint with In-line Keys (VTFL-RSSP-I); Handmade Sterling Silver with Offset G, Split-E Mechanism and Rolled Tone Holes (VTFL-RSSS-O); and Handmade Sterling Silver with In-line Keys and Rolled Tone Holes (VTFL-RSSS-I). All models feature a B foot, french pointed keys, double bladder pads and custom engraving, all in an exquisite Locust Wood case.

More info: victorymusical.com

3. Straightahead Alto Piece

The Lakshmi Alto mouthpiece by Theo Wanne follows in the footsteps of its predecessor for tenor saxophone with its response and playability, all while maintaining a thick, rich core sound. The mouthpiece is suited for straightahead jazz, and particularly big band alto. The Lakshmi Alto comes in both hard rubber and metal options.

More info: theowanne.com

4. Road House

The P. Mauriat Touring Case combines hard-shell protection and aesthetic appeal. Features include a zippered external lumbar pouch, a water-resistant Midnight Blue exterior shell deluxe backpack straps with reflective logo and push-button latches. It is currently available for alto and tenor saxophone.

More info: pmauriatmusic.com

5. Clarinet Practice Mute

Buffet Crampon's ClariMate, a digital clarinet mute, works on any B-flat or A clarinet and is inserted between the mouthpiece and tuning barrel. It features a stand-alone mode for silent practicing and syncs up to the ClariMate app, available on most desktop and mobile platforms, providing MIDI capabilities.

More info: clarimate.us

Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band brought its brand of orchestrated jazz, chops-busting charts and L.A.-style sizzle to a NAMM Show celebration for Dansr Inc., the U.S. Vandoren distributor.

BEST OF THE 2024 NAMM SHOW

REPORTING BY ED ENRIGHT AND KATIE KAILUS

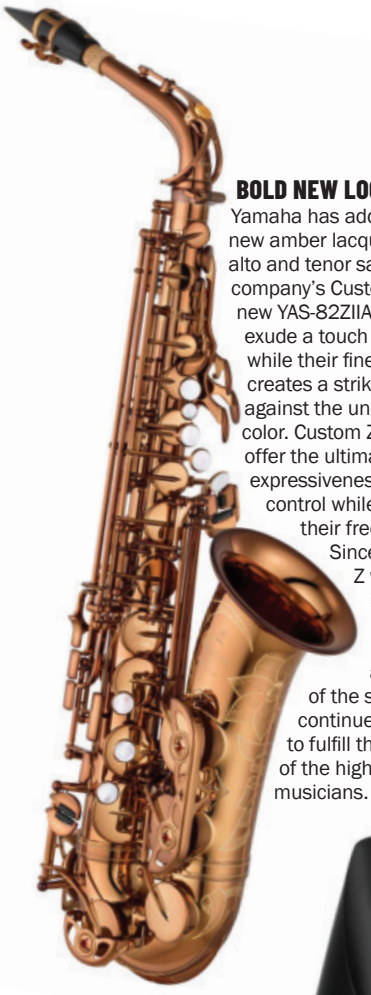
The NAMM Show is a feast of the ears and eyes for anyone with a business interest in musical merchandise of any kind. This year's edition of the global music industry's annual showcase for new instruments and gear was held Jan. 25–28 on the campus of the Anaheim Convention Center in Southern California. True to form, the sprawling show and its many musical hangs drew an enthusiastic cast of retailers, manufacturers, distributors and artists who browsed the exhibit areas, gave product demonstrations and took part in after-hours concerts and jams. In the following pages, DownBeat presents the best of The 2024 NAMM Show.

NESTING DRUM KIT

The Tamburo Mia is a nesting drum set that blends portability with versatility and sound quality. Designed for drummers on the move, the Mia offers a unique nesting capability that allows each shell of the drum set to fit seamlessly and simultaneously within the bass drum, transforming it into an easily transportable package. Each drum shell is constructed from high-quality materials, producing rich, full-bodied tones with superior projection and resonance. (proelnorthamerica.com)

RESONANT HORN, COMPLEX SOUND

Blessing's Artist B-flat BTR1660 Professional Trumpets feature an American-made, one-piece, hand-hammered bell and a two-piece valve casing with nickel balusters. The result is a resonant instrument with a broad range of tonal colors. The sound is complex, with the ability to drive the tone in many different directions. It is available in silver plate and raw brass finishes. (blessingbrass.com)



BOLD NEW LOOK

Yamaha has added a stunning new amber lacquer finish to the alto and tenor saxophones in the company's Custom Z line. The new YAS-82ZIIA and YTS 82ZIIA exude a touch of vintage charm, while their fine hand engraving creates a striking contrast against the underlying brass color. Custom Z saxophones offer the ultimate combination of expressiveness, response and control while staying true to their free-spirited origins. Since the Custom Z was developed in 2003, the technology, craftsmanship and specifications of the series have continued to improve to fulfill the needs of the highest level musicians. (usa.yamaha.com)

GO FOR THE GOLD

JodyJazz has made its Hand-Hammered HH Tenor Saxophone mouthpiece a standard offering in the line, available in regular gold plate. The new HH Tenor mouthpieces are available in size 6*, 7* and 8* tip openings. A matching Hand-Hammered JodyJazz Power Ring ligature in regular gold is available separately. Launched in 2022 as part of a 300-piece limited run, the original JodyJazz HH Tenor model, in rose gold finish, quickly sold out. (jodyjazz.com)

HIGH-DENSITY EBONITE

Vandoren has introduced Black Diamond HD Ebonite Clarinet Mouthpieces made from a high-density ebonite whose physical properties optimize the playing experience. The BD4 HD, BD5 HD and BD6 HD offer excellent projection, full-bodied sound, precise articulation and greater control. (dansr.com)

WARM SOUND, VERSATILE FLUGEL

Schilke Music products has introduced the 1042 FLB, the newest addition to the brand's line of prorfessional flugelhorns. The instrument features a one-piece, hand-hammered yellow brass bell that provides superior intonation and response. The warm sound and consistency throughout the range of the flugelhorn make it a versatile option for brass band players, chamber music performers and jazz musicians. (schilkemusic.com)

REFINED CONSOLE DIGITALS

Casio unveiled a trio of premium-level Celviano digital console pianos that feature a new style and rosewood finish, detailed Hamburg grand piano tone, a redesigned speaker system and a visual information bar. The three new models — the AP-750, AP-550 and AP-S450 — incorporate the Smart Hybrid hammer Action Keyboard Cevliano Edition, a subtle yet significant refinement over the action found in Casio's most recent Privia models. (casiomusicgear.com)

PREAMPED VOCAL MIC

Designed for recording vocalists, the Shure SM7dB XLR dynamic microphone delivers the company's classic SM7B sound with the addition of a Shure-designed built-in preamp with technology licensed by Cloud. The integrated preamp simplifies audio workflows by removing the need for inline amplification and provides a supplementary +18 or +28 decibels of clean gain. (shure.com)

SUPERSTAR REISSUE

In honor of Tama's 50th anniversary, the company announced a limited-edition reissue of its original Superstar drum kit, first introduced in 1976. The Superstar kit is known for its powerful sound and versatile performance capabilities. The all-birch shells deliver a warm, rich and commanding tone and feature chrome hardware true to the vintage style. It comes in a variety of finishes, including super maple, cherry white, aqua marine and super mahogany. (tama.com)

SLEEK DESIGN, ENHANCED RESONANCE

Toca Percussion's Custom Deluxe Matte Finish Congas and Bongos, available in matte gray and matte blue, draw inspiration from the sleek esthetics of sports cars and rugged pickup trucks. The congas, with their Asian Oak shells and Afro-Cuban shell shape, deliver enhanced volume and resonance, ensuring a powerful and rich sound. Durable chrome hardware provides longevity as well as a touch of elegance, while the EasyPlay hoop design and six lugs contribute to playability and tuning stability. (tocapercussion.com)

SMALL CHAMBER EVOLUTION

The Brahma Soprano from Theo Wanne marks an evolution of the traditional small-chamber soprano saxophone mouthpiece. Brahma takes the fundamental features of those types of mouthpieces and updates them with new design technologies. The Brahma has a Small-Stadium-Chamber that provides tremendous projection, and a flat sidewall that "twists" into the chamber. These features allow the Brahma to do it all, from ballads to jazz to rock 'n' roll, with a large, dark, vintage-like core sound. (theowanne.com)

SYNTH EXPANSION

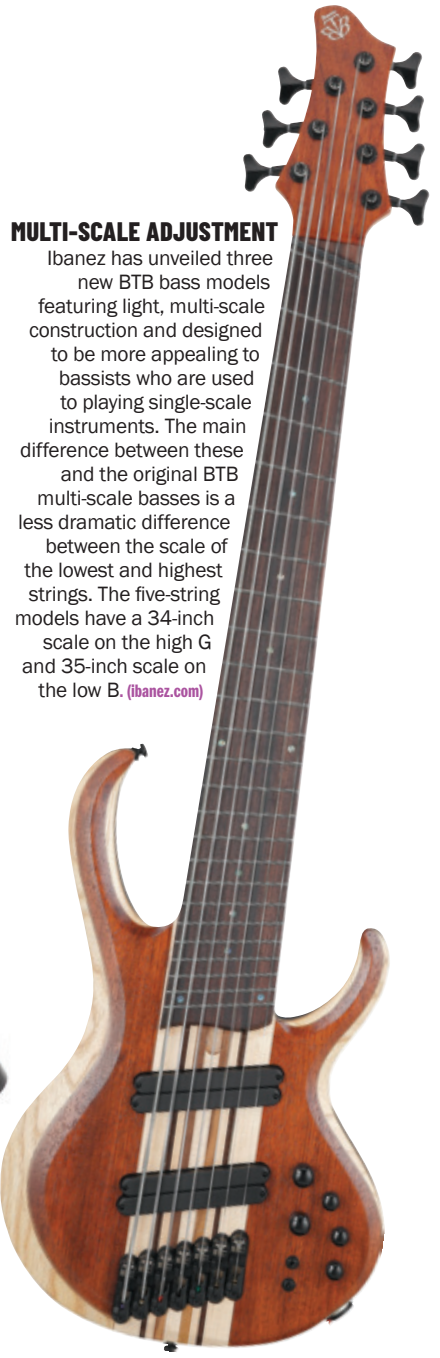
Yamaha's latest Montage M synthesizer lineup features a new AN-X Analog Engine and improved AWM2 Engine that, combined with the FM-X Engine, give a total of 400 notes of polyphony. Musicians can achieve optimal workflow integration through the Montage M's USB MIDI and audio interface, Expanded Softsynth Plug-in and faster, easier navigation. (usa.yahama.com)

BIG BAND DRUMS

In "Jazz Big Band for the Modern Drummer" (Hal Leonard), author Ulysses Owens Jr. explains how to authentically support a jazz big band from behind the kit with authority, confidence and finesse. The book includes 15 recreated drum charts that Owens —a Grammy-winning drummer, producer and educator — has used on his own albums, as well as audio tracks where he demonstrates the grooves and patterns being taught. (halleonard.com)

MULTI-SCALE ADJUSTMENT

Ibanez has unveiled three new BTB bass models featuring light, multi-scale construction and designed to be more appealing to bassists who are used to playing single-scale instruments. The main difference between these and the original BTB multi-scale basses is a less dramatic difference between the scale of the lowest and highest strings. The five-string models have a 34-inch scale on the high G and 35-inch scale on the low B. (ibanez.com)



COMPACT SHOTGUN

DPA Microphones' 2017 Shotgun microphone captures authentic sound with high directivity, clarity and consistency. It excels in challenging live-performance scenarios like outdoor concerts, festivals and theatrical presentations. The compact microphone measures 184 millimeters in length. (dpamicrophones.com)

SMALL RECORDER, BIG IDEAS

Billed as a "little recorder for big ideas," the Zoom R4 takes the company's MultiTrak series in a new direction. The compact, four-track recorder features 32-bit float recording technology and a dedicated bounce track that lets musicians record up to four tracks at a time, then bounce them down to a single dedicated track. This allows users to add endless layers to any recording and lets them undo their last bounce if further mixing or recording is needed. The Zoom R4 is equipped with onboard effects, along with a high-quality built-in microphone. zoomcorp.com

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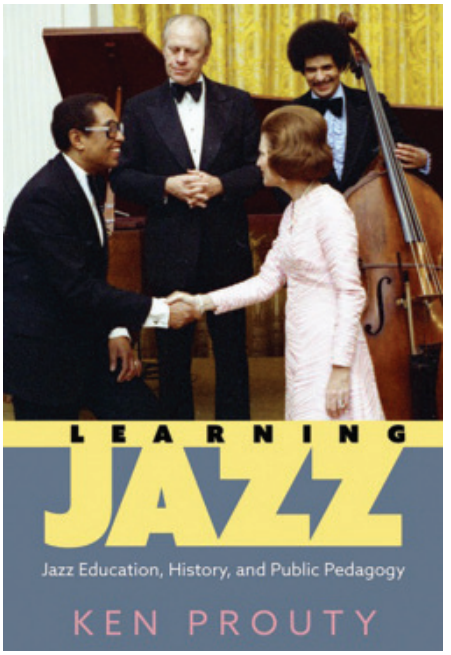
"I've always been interested in the concept of how people come to know and learn about this music," says author Ken Prouty in regard to his new book on jazz education in all of its forms.



Exploring Jazz Education and Public Pedagogy

WHAT'S THE COMMON FACTOR FOR these seemingly disparate jazz topics? The hostile reaction jazz critics and musicians had to director Damien Chazelle's depiction of jazz in his films *Whiplash* and *La La Land*. The immense impact of bandleader Stan Kenton on jazz education. The star power and influence of Maynard Ferguson's performance style on a generation of white male high school brass players. Case studies on the impact that trombone instruction publications from the early 1900s had on the definition of jazz. The impact of Jazz at Lincoln Center on jazz education through a focus on Duke Ellington's oeuvre and its annual Essentially Ellington competition.

Ken Prouty, associate professor of musicology and jazz studies at the Michigan State University College of Music, offers some answers to these topics in the wide-ranging and fascinating book *Learning Jazz: Jazz Education, History and Public Pedagogy*, published by University Press of Mississippi.

In a recent interview with DownBeat, Prouty discussed how these seemingly disparate topics all relate to learning jazz — which includes both formal jazz education and public pedagogy — and all forms of jazz education that occur beyond the classroom.

"I've always been interested in the concept of how people come to know and learn about this music," explains Prouty, whose first book, *Knowing Jazz: Community, Pedagogy, and Canon in the Information Age*, was published in 2012. "I've been teaching since 2007, and one of the things that's struck me is the idea that jazz education programs are distinct from the so-called real world of jazz. Making a sharp distinction between them misses a deeper connection between the two. Formal jazz education is part of the history of jazz and its development. But everybody who engages with this music is part of its history, has an investment in it and a role in educating others about jazz. You can be a musician, a musicologist, a writer, a student, a radio host, a fan."

In the first chapter, Prouty examines early jazz trombone method books from 1919 to the mid-1920s written by musicians such as Henry Fillmore and Miff Mole that provided musical guidance in early jazz forms — and helped solidify the definition of jazz styles for aspiring musicians attracted to the music. Prouty then addresses "lost voices" in jazz with a look at Paul Eduard Miller, who wrote for DownBeat and other jazz publications in the 1930s but faded from view by the 1950s. He also contrasts the lack of coverage of female big bands, and examines the intense critical focus on legends such as Armstrong, Ellington, Parker and others that at times seems to place them at a level of genius that deflects criticism while the world of everyday jazz musicians remains largely unexplored.

At the core of Prouty's new book is the impact of public pedagogy in any form of jazz education. "Every interaction that a jazz person has with somebody is an exercise in public pedagogy by trying to get people into jazz," he states. Prouty cites Stan Kenton and Maynard Ferguson as key figures in public pedagogy from the 1950s on, and their influence on formal jazz education and the public's concept of jazz. Kenton's support of Leon Breeden's North Texas State college program and Ferguson's charismatic, physical playing style, arrangements of movie themes from *Rocky* and *Star Wars* films and frequent concert appearances at high schools and colleges connected strongly with young white male jazz students. And those same students — like Kenton's frequently all-white bands — went on to college programs that were predominately white as well.

"Leon Breeden and Kenton's support really helped make the North Texas program," explains Prouty. "It bears the imprint of Kenton, who absolutely had an incalculable impact on jazz education. We're still benefiting from it, but we're also still grappling with the issues of racial and gender equity in jazz education."

Prouty brings his own personal experience to bear on these topics. He was a member of the famed One O'Clock Lab Band at North Texas State (now the University of North Texas, where he received a master's in music). In high school in Maine, he opened a concert for Ferguson as a member of his school's jazz band and was an enthusiastic member of the Maynard fan club.

"I like to talk about my own experiences in my writing because it's shaped who I am," says Prouty. "I think at times there's a reluctance among researchers to embrace these things."

Prouty emphasizes that public pedagogy efforts are not always positive, especially when they come in response to perceived negative views about the way jazz is portrayed in the media. Case in point: the critically acclaimed 2014 film *Whiplash*, which depicts the relationship between an aspiring student drummer at the fictional Shaffer Conservatory in New York and his demanding, abusive teacher. Many jazz critics took exception to its portrayal of the dark side of jazz education.

Despite the problematic issues that face jazz education in the academic realm and through public pedagogy, Prouty concluded the interview on an optimistic note. "We'll bring people to this music by showing them the common humanities that exist between certain forms and identifying spaces where jazz and other styles share something in common," he says. "The boundaries of jazz are porous and have always been that way." —*Terry Perkins*

Blindfold Test 〉 BY ASHLEY KAHN

Samara Joy

Samara Joy's first DownBeat Blindfold Test took place on the stage of the Sala Bossi recital room in Bologna, Italy, with a towering 200-year-old pipe organ behind her. The event was hosted by the Conservatorio Giovanni Battista Martini and attended by some 30 students, faculty and members of the public. Of the countries Joy has visited since her meteoric arrival, Italy holds a special charm. "Every time I come here, I feel so at home," the star vocalist said. "Like my friend Pasquale [Grasso] says, 'The Italians, even when they speak, it sounds like music.'" Later that same November day, Joy performed a well-received, sold-out concert as part of the Bologna Jazz Festival.

FEDERICO MUTTI

"Oh, man, her voice is so warm, so comforting," Samara Joy said of Lizz Wright.

Carmen McRae

"No More Blues (*Chega de Saudade*)" (*At the Great American Music Hall*, Blue Note, 1976) McRae, vocals; Marshall Otwell, piano; Ed Bennett, bass; Joey Baron, drums.

I've absorbed Carmen's voice for the past couple of years and as soon as I hear it, I know that it's her. I know this is a later recording, I hear maturity and growth in her voice. There was a spoken element in addition to her relaxed feel. I took a class with Ralph Lalama in my sophomore year [at SUNY Purchase] and "Chega de Saudade" was one of the tunes that we came in contact with, and that one stayed with me after. It's a difficult song melody-wise, and I love Dizzy Gillespie's arrangement of it, as well. Don't be surprised if you hear it this evening.

Johnny O'Neal

"Tight" (*O'Neal Is Back*, Abeat Records, 2016) O'Neal, vocals, piano; Luke Sellick, bass; Charles Goold, drums.

That is a song written by Miss Betty Carter and, at first, the name Kevin Mahogany popped into my head; then I was like, maybe it's Andy Bey. But I'm pretty sure the vocalist is also the pianist. I think it's Johnny O'Neal. I love him. The way he sings, it's very playful, kind of spoken — similar to Carmen. I noticed that the comping, as well, is great, very connected. I came to this song myself through another professor of mine, Kenny Washington, who played on this song on an album called *The Audience With Betty Carter.*

Andy & the Bey Sisters

"Everybody Loves My Baby" (*'Round Midnight*, Prestige, 1965) Geraldine and Salome Bey, vocals; Andy Bey, piano, vocals; Kenny Burrell, guitar; Milt Hinton, bass; Osie Johnson, drums.

I have Kenny to thank for introducing me to this record, too. I love that album. This is Andy Bey and the Bey Sisters, and I absolutely love the blend they have because when you're singing in a choir. It takes a long time to develop an intuitive reaction, but with family it just sounds effortless. You know, in two weeks I'm going to tour with my family to sing gospel. I'm really excited because I grew up listening to them sing together and now I'm getting the opportunity to share something that's been in our family for years.

Cécile McLorin Salvant

"America The Beautiful" (*TikTok video of performance before U.S. Open Women's Final*, 2023) Salvant, vocals; Sullivan Fortner, piano.

I'm going to guess Cécile McLorin Salvant and Sullivan Fortner. I haven't seen the video of this, but I knew that she was going to do that [changing the lyric to "America The Beautiful"]. I feel like her voice captures her message. It's full, it's all-encompassing. She's not afraid to use her range. When I was growing up, I wasn't aware of politics. We didn't talk about it much in my house. But now it's really hard to turn away. I'm trying my best to keep up with the facts and for now keep it about the music. My message is about finding solace.

José James

"Little Bird" (*Jazzanova: Of All The Things*, Verve, 2008) James, vocals; Kalle Kalima, acoustic guitar; Dragan Radosavievich, Volodymyr Korobov, violins; Rouven Schirmer, Sojung Lee, cellos; Paul Kleber, bass; Stefan Leisering, piano, drum programming.

No way would you play Andy Bey two times. But I think that's José James. I can hear Andy's influence. When I hear José, I definitely hear soul inflections, which is a part of jazz as well. For me, jazz singing is a balance of technique and creativity and understanding the sound of the genre, understanding our heroes like Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie. You can build up on that foundation and carve out your own sound.

Roberta Gambarini

"Estate" (*So In Love*, Groovin' High, 2009) Gambarini, vocals; Gerald Clayton, piano; Chuck Berghofer, bass; Jake Hanna, drums.

I love the way the piano was accompanying the singer here, and I think that's Roberta Gambarini. Her voice is very recognizable. I love hearing her sing certain words in Portuguese, French, Italian. [*Sings an Italian lyric.*] I learned an Italian song — "Un Anno d'Amore." Is [my pronunciation] OK?

Alice Coltrane

"Jagadishwar" (*Turiya Sings*, Impulse, 2021) Coltrane, vocals, organ.

That was a curveball. I don't even know what language that is. I will say I love the mix because the vocalist is in the center and the organ, or whatever that instrument is, is surrounding and not overwhelming the voice. There was a chord a couple bars in that definitely sounds reminiscent of the Black church. She does have a very deep voice. She's using music out of the Black church in a different way. It puts you in a meditative state.

Lizz Wright

"Stars Fell On Alabama" (*Grace*, Concord, 2017) Wright, vocals; Chris Bruce, Marvin Sewell, guitars; Kenny Banks, keyboards; David Piltch, bass; Jay Bellerose, drums.

I'm familiar with the Ella and Louis Armstrong version, and this treatment is definitely more a folk, country vibe — and it makes sense: Alabama, country, folk. No acrobatics going on. It's very deep and to the point, and so I'm going to go with Lizz Wright. Oh, man, her voice is so warm, so comforting. I remember one of my professors at Purchase saying I reminded him of her. We haven't met. But we've definitely trailed each other here and in the States. **DB**

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given to the artist prior to the test.

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